涼宮ハルヒの溜息

すずみやはるひのためいき

谷川 流（ながる）

角川スニーカー文庫

●谷川 流（たにがわ ながる）

兵庫県在住。2003年、第8回スニーカー大賞〈大賞〉を『涼宮ハルヒの憂鬱』で受賞し、デビューを果たす。また、電撃文庫より『学校を出よう！』シリーズも刊行中。趣味はバイクと麻雀。人生自転車操業中。今一番欲しいモノは心の余裕と別の人格。

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谷川 流
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The Sighs of Suzumiya Haruhi

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Prologue

Haruhi seems like the kind of person who shouldn't have any worries. But, she does. Only the thing that's bothering her is that "The world is too mundane."

To her, the "Non-mundane things" are any kind of supernatural phenomena, meaning she often thinks things like "I can't believe there's not even half a ghost appearing before me."

I should also let you know that the word "ghost" can be replaced with "aliens", "time-travelers", or "espers." However, it is common knowledge that these things only appear in fiction novels. They simply don't exist in reality. Which means, as long as Haruhi continues to live in this world, she will continue to be bothered by this fact. The world is supposed to be like this; nothing out of the ordinary. However, recent events in my life have made it very hard for me to have confidence in this fact; I'm also bothered.

Because I know these aliens, time-travelers, and espers do exist.

"Listen to me, I need to tell you something very important." "What?"

"Haven't you always wished for the existence of aliens or time-travelers or espers?" "That's right. So what?"

"In other words, the purpose of our SOS Brigade is to find these people. Right?" "Not only to find them, we have to be able to play together. Just finding them isn't good enough, I want to participate in the act, not just be part of the audience." "But I always wish I was watching from the sidelines… sigh, whatever. But have you ever thought that these aliens, time-travelers, or espers might be surprisingly close to us?" "Ah? What do you mean? Don't tell me you mean Yuki, Mikuru-chan, or Koizumi-kun? If it's them, then that's not really a 'surprise'." "Umm… actually I meant to tell you that it was them all along." "Are you an idiot? It can't be that easy."

"That's true, this would be too simple by normal standards." "Then tell me, who's the alien?"

"You would be very glad to hear this. Nagato Yuki is the alien. Hmm, how should I put it? Should be Integrated something entity… or Data something entity… something like that. Basically created by aliens and given a body."

"Hm, then what about Mikuru-chan?"

"Asahina-san is easy to explain: she's a time-traveler. She comes from the future. There's no problem calling her a time-traveler right?"

"Then how many years into the future is she from?"

"I don't know this, she didn't tell me that."

“Oh, I see.”

“Really?”

“That means Koizumi-kun is an esper? Were you planning on telling me that from the start?”
“That is correct.”

“Ahh.”

Haruhi twitched her eyebrows while she spoke, then slowly breathed in some air, and screamed:
“DON’T MESS WITH ME!”

Just like that, Haruhi completely discarded the truth that took me so much effort to get out. Oh well, this was expected of her. Even after the three of them each used their own way to show me that they were indeed an alien, a time-traveler, and an esper, I still had doubts in my mind. To make Haruhi believe this, especially considering that she hadn’t seen what I had seen, was almost impossible.

But what else could I say? I had told her the absolute truth. Even though I don’t look like a very credible guy, when I know there’s no benefit to be gained from lying, I will tell the truth.

But in fact Haruhi wasn’t at fault either. If a nice guy came up to me and said “This person you know is actually someone unbelievable…” I believe I would also lose my temper and start yelling at him. If some guy said that kind of stuff to me with a straight face, I would probably think that his brain had been infected by some virus, or had been addled by poisonous waves. Perhaps I’d even feel sorry for the guy. I don’t think I would continue to talk to that guy in any case.

Hmm, right now, isn’t “that guy” me?

“Kyon, get your ears over here and listen carefully.”

Haruhi stared at me with fire in her eyes.

“It doesn’t matter whether it’s an alien, a time-traveler, or a esper. They’re not going to casually appear in front of us just like that! Do you know how precious they are? If we find them, we have to grab them by the neck, tie them up, and hang them up so they can’t escape! The people that I randomly grabbed off the streets to join our club can’t be that rare and precious!”

Wow, that actually made some sense. But other than me, the other three really are blessed with supernatural characteristics. I’m the only normal human being. Wait a minute, did she say that she just grabbed random people to be in her club?

Sigh, why does this dumb girl only have common sense when it comes to strange topics? If she would only believe me, everything would be much simpler. At least this bogus SOS Brigade could disband, since it was formed for the sole purpose of finding aliens et al for Haruhi. Once she finds those things, there won't be any point in keeping this club around. After that, she can play with those unnatural beings all she likes, while I stay to the side and add a few laughs here and there. I hope this happens soon, because right now I feel like a circus animal being forced to perform.

However, if Haruhi had any sense of what was happening around her, I don't know what the world would be like.

Ah yes. I should let you know that only two people participated in this dialogue, from the beginning. It happened during the second "SOS Brigade wandering around in the city (temporary name)" club event, when I talked with Haruhi inside the restaurant by the station. I didn't have any doubts that Haruhi would pay for the meal; I'd explained all that to her very naturally as I was sipping my coffee. But she didn't take me seriously at all. I'm fine with that though. Whoever believes in that stuff needs to have their brain examined.

As for me, I didn't bother to tell her the specifics, since details in things like this would only cause more suspicion. Since all this was coming from me: the guy who got dragged to Nagato's apartment and had to listen to a long series of unclear explanations, there was no reason to suspect anything funny.

"I don't ever want to hear lame jokes like this again."

Haruhi drained all the yellow-greenish vegetable juice from her glass, and said: "Let's go! We can't separate into two groups today, so let's just wander around! Oh yeah, I forgot to bring my wallet today. Here's the bill." While I was still staring at the eight hundred and thirty yen bill, thinking about how to protest this atrocity, Haruhi grabbed my coffee and finished it. That left me with the impression that she wasn't going to accept any protests. She then marched out of the restaurant, and stood in front of the automatic door with her arms crossed.

Half a year has already passed since then. Now that I think about it, I seem to have experienced a lot of strange phenomena during these past six months. SOS Brigade's official name is still "The Save the world by Overloading it with fun Suzumiya Haruhi's Brigade" which gives me the creeps. I have no idea where in the world this club brought more excitement to. I think only Haruhi felt whatever excitement it was supposed to bring. Also, the club's reason for existence is still a mystery. The original goal was something about playing with aliens, kidnapping time travelers, and battling alongside espers. However from Haruhi's perspective, this goal still hasn't been reached.

This is all because Haruhi believes she hasn't met any aliens, time travelers or espers. Coming to that conclusion isn't something I can help. I've already told her the other three members' true identities, but she just won't believe me. So this shouldn't be my responsibility anymore, right?

Even though the SOS Brigade has failed to reach its intended goal, thus losing its primary reason for existence, it still hasn't disbanded. Even now, this unrecognized organization still secretly exists in the Old Shack.

Of course, our five members, including myself, still choose to hang out in our clubroom every day. The student council, after several meetings and different levels of analysis, seems to have chosen to ignore us. They didn't approve our club initiation documents, but they didn't say anything regarding our forced takeover of the Literature Club either. Maybe it's because the club's only member, Nagato Yuki, has no problem with us being here. However, I personally believe that the student council simply does not want to get into an argument with Haruhi, so they've decided to feign ignorance.

I don't think anyone in the world would intentionally step on something that says "Warning: explodes when stepped on" in red neon lights. Even I don't have the courage to do that. If I had only known, I would not have talked to that stubborn girl who put up that unfriendly expression every day.

A normal high schooler who accidentally pressed a button that activated a time bomb, and is now being forced to carry that bomb around like a moron – that's me. And this time bomb labeled "Suzumiya Haruhi" doesn't even have a counter on it. I have no idea when it's going to explode, how much damage it will cause, or what else is inside. Even more importantly, I don't even know if this bomb is real. Maybe it's just a toy used to fool little kids.

I can't seem to find the trash bin labeled "Hazardous Materials Only" no matter how hard I try. Which means, this dangerous entity that I've activated is essentially covered with superglue, stuck to my hand harder than anything else could be.

Sigh… Where am I gonna find a place to dump it?

Chapter 1

High schools organize certain activities from time to time, and the high school that I attend held a sports day last month. When Haruhi suggested that the SOS Brigade participate in the inter-club relay race, one of the many competitive events held that day, I felt quite dubious. To make things worse, we ended up actually beating the Athletics club and the Rugby club in the relay race, in which Haruhi overwhelmed the second place runner by a whole thirteen horses' lengths!

So as a result, our club went from being an unspoken taboo, only discussed in the shadows (except by me), towards being the current fad at school, reminiscent of a troublemaker who pulls fire alarms. I was already at a total loss on how to deal with this, but there was more. Of course Haruhi was the main instigator of all this, but Nagato, who had run the second leg of the race, was just as guilty. I could never forget her speed, which could only be described as instantaneous movement. Nagato, you should at least warn me before you do that!

When I asked Nagato what sort of magic she used this time, the stoic, alien-created living humanoid interface replied with explanatory terms such as "energy positioning", "molecular dispersion" and other jargon. Of course, such explanations meant nothing to me, since I had already decided to embrace the artistic subjects and abandon the scientific ones, to which I gave absolutely no effort in comprehension or trying to comprehend.

After that tumultuous sports day ended, a month passed by and the school festival came up. So at this moment, this insignificant prefectural high school is busily preparing for this festival… though the only people who are really doing anything are the teachers and members from the organizing committee and the art-related clubs, since it is their only chance to flex their muscles.

Now when it came to club-related contributions to the festival, the as-yet unrecognized SOS Brigade was not required to provide any creative attractions. Actually, if it were allowed as our club contribution, I wouldn't mind locking up a stray cat in a cage, adding a sign indicating "Extraterrestrial Alien" and displaying it as a sideshow attraction to make money just like in a circus. Though I think that would be unwise because people without a sense of humor would be terribly offended while others with a sense of humor would only laugh despicably.

This sort of attraction wouldn't require any serious consideration for values and success—it didn't even require any real effort. The same could be said for the rest of the attractions. High school festivals in real life can be that gritty. If you think I'm joking, visit any school holding festivities. When you do, you will realize then that such attractions are pretty much considered a regular expectation of school festivals.

On the other hand, what did class 1-5, the class Haruhi and I belong to, intend to do that day? It turns out that we will be preparing some sort of lame questionnaire. I can see it only as a cover so as to appear to be organizing something for the festival. Ever since Asakura Ryoko disappeared this spring, our class had been devoid of a student with leadership qualities. So due to the lack of student participation, this uncreative idea was painstakingly brainstormed by Okabe-sensei during the long and boring homeroom session. Without anyone consenting or

objecting, the motion passed and the long homeroom session was over. But what kind of questionnaire? Who would actually be interested in doing this?

Probably no one, I suppose. But since it's been decided, keep up the great work guys! And so, suffering from apathy syndrome, I walked wearily towards the club room.

Why did I go, you ask?

Naturally, this is because of a domineering girl coming towards me and rambling endlessly, "What questionnaire? This is so retarded!"

She said this with an outraged expression on her face. "I mean, where's the fun in that? I totally don't get it!" Then why didn't you suggest something better? Weren't you there as well, looking at Okabe-sensei standing there like a lonely ghost, not knowing what to do? "Forget it, I never intended to join any of the class's activities anyway. There's no fun in organizing an activity with these guys." But didn't you contribute to the class by winning all of the inter-class races on sports day? I thought it was you who won as the last baton in the short, medium, and long distance relays. Or has my memory served me wrong? "That was different."

What was different?

"A school festival is a school festival, or in other words, a campus festival. Though public schools are seldom called campuses, but that doesn't matter. After all, isn't the school festival the most important activity of the whole school year?"

Is that so?

"Absolutely!" She nodded vigorously, then faced me and announced the following, "The SOS Brigade will do something very interesting!"

The face of Suzumiya Haruhi now shone with the same determined look as Hannibal, who had decided to cross the Alps during the Second Punic War.

Shining she may be, but……

For the past six months, whatever Haruhi thought was "interesting" was anything but interesting to me, and her interests have all resulted in me being exhausted. At least, that's so for me and Asahina-san, but this is because we're normal human beings after all. From what I see, it is common knowledge that Haruhi isn't a normal person, while Koizumi possesses a state of mind not present in ordinary humans. As for Nagato, she's not even human to begin with.

Hanging out with this bunch, how am I supposed to peacefully live through this extraordinary high school life of mine? I really don't want to get involved in silly stuff anymore. Just thinking

about it is enough to give me an urge to aim a gun at my forehead, or extract and burn the brain cells containing those memories. Though I don't know what Haruhi would say about that.

Maybe I was too busy thinking how to erase those memories of the past because I wasn't paying attention to what the annoying girl next to me was raving about.

"Hey, Kyon, are you even listening?"

"I wasn't, where were you again?"

"The school festival! You ought to be more excited! We only get a school festival once a year!" "That may be true, but you don't have to be so concerned about it." "Of course I have to be concerned! It won't be a school festival if it isn't exciting enough. It should be like the campus festivals that I know of." "Did you do something ridiculous while in junior high?"

"No, it wasn't fun at all. So it won't be reasonable if the high school festival isn't fun as well." "Then what is it that you find interesting?"

"Like real monsters appearing in a haunted house, the number of steps in a flight of stairs suddenly increasing, the number of school mysteries jumping from seven to thirteen, an Afro hairstyle three times the size of a normal head appearing on the principal's head, the school transforming into a giant robot and doing battle with the monster from under the sea, or even autumn being represented by plum blossoms…"

After listening halfway, I stopped paying attention to Haruhi, so I forgot what was said after she mentioned how many number of steps there are in a flight of stairs. If anyone was paying attention, please do let me know.

"……Sigh, forget it. I'll tell you more when we get to the club room." Haruhi strode with large footsteps towards the club room in a bad mood, and in a moment's time, we arrived at the door. The sign above the door read, "Literature Club," and cellotaped under that sign was a piece of paper with scribbling that read "with the SOS Brigade." "Since we've stayed here for half a year already, I don't suppose anyone would mind if we claimed this room for ourselves." Haruhi unilaterally declared her sovereignty over the use of the room and had wanted to remove the original sign, but I stopped her. After all, it's important for humans to maintain a certain amount of caution in their actions.

Haruhi opened the door without knocking, and standing inside was a fairy girl. When her eyes met with mine, she smiled like a lily blossoming.

"Oh… hello."

Wearing a maid costume and sweeping the room with a broomstick is the best tea girl ever, the pride of the SOS Brigade – Asahina Mikuru-san. As usual, she carried a sweet smile befitting of a fairy residing in the club room and welcomed my arrival. Maybe she is a fairy in disguise. She feels more like a fairy than a time traveler from the future.

Asahina-san was forcefully dragged over by Haruhi during the founding of the brigade, as Haruhi explained, “We needed a mascot.” Then under Haruhi’s demands, she was forced to put on a maid costume and has since become the SOS Brigade’s official maid. Every day after school, she would transform into the perfect maid. This is not because of any loose screws in her brain, but more because she was so honest and so sincere that I could almost cry.

Asahina-san has dressed as a bunny girl, a nurse and all other sorts of costumes for the SOS Brigade. Yet I felt the maid costume suited her best. To put it simply, it’s because this costume has no hidden meaning or innuendo, which was why I hoped she would go on like that. Maybe I should emphasize something: Haruhi’s actions rarely have any meaning to them.

Yet her actions often become the trigger for something else, and have put us into a lot of trouble, so I actually felt it would be better for her actions to be truly meaningless.

The often eccentric Haruhi has very rarely done anything correctly, or I should say she’s only ever done one correct thing, and that is in picking Asahina-san’s maid costume. Since it suited her too well, it’s enough to make people dizzy. It is only for this alone that I give credit to Haruhi’s eccentric behavior. I don’t know where she bought it or how much she paid, but Haruhi does have some taste when it comes to elegant costumes. Though I believe Asahina-san would look great in anything she wears, just like a professional model. And my favorite costume of them all is the maid costume. There must be some meaning with this costume, for it was always able to satiate my visual senses.

“I’ll go brew some tea.”

Asahina-san said with her soft, adorable voice. She placed the broomstick into the cleaning cabinet and scurried over towards the kitchen cupboard, taking out everyone’s cups.

My abdomen suddenly suffered an intense pain, and when I came to my senses, I realized Haruhi had jabbed her elbow into me.

“Your eyes have squinted as thin as a line now.”

Maybe I was too moved by Asahina-san’s cute movements, so naturally I squinted my eyes leaving only a narrow gap. I believe everyone would have the same reaction after seeing the adorably elegant and shy Asahina-san.

Haruhi walked towards the desk with a black triangular spike that read “Commander,” and took out an armband that also read “Commander” from the drawer and put it on. She then kicked the steel chair out from the desk and sat on it, overlooking the club room.

Sitting by the corner of a table reading a thick book was another member of the brigade.

“……”

Sitting there fully concentrated on reading her book is none other than Nagato Yuki, the first year Literature Club student, who to Haruhi would be like "a bonus gift that comes along with occupying the Literature Club room."

Her existence is as subtle as nitrogen in the atmosphere, yet of all the first years in the brigade she is the most extraordinary. Her extraordinariness far exceeds that of Haruhi. I know absolutely nothing about Haruhi, yet while I do know something about Nagato, this only makes me even more confused about her. If what Nagato said was correct, then this silent short-haired little schoolgirl lacking of expression, emotion, and empathy is not a human but a living humanoid interface created by aliens to interact with humans. It still sounds very absurd. But since she herself has said so, I do not want to question any further since it does sound real. Of course, Haruhi doesn't know about this; Haruhi still treats her as "quite a weird bookworm."

Though objectively speaking, "quite" is an understatement.

"Where's Koizumi-kun?"

Haruhi glared at Asahina-san with her sharp glare. Asahina-san shuddered for a moment, then said, "Eh…h…he's not here yet, he's quite late today……"

Asahina-san carefully brought out the tea leaves from the tin and placed them in the little teapot. I casually looked at the hanging rack by the corner of the club room. All sorts of costumes hung on top of it, like a theatre resting room. From the left hung a nurse costume, a bunny girl costume, a summer maid costume, a yukata, a white blouse, a leopard skin costume, a woolen frog puppet costume, and all other sorts of unidentifiable costumes.

For the past six months these costumes have all graced the warm skin of Asahina-san. Let me explain further, there is absolutely no reason for Asahina-san to wear these costumes, apart from satisfying Haruhi's own ego. Maybe she suffered some sort of trauma in the past? Like not getting the dress-up doll she wanted when she was young, so now she sees Asahina-san as a large doll to play around with. Thanks to this, Asahina-san's emotional scars have increased as the days go by, while my visual senses get stimulated as a result, creating a sense of happiness for me. Sigh. Overall, I don't think a lot of people have benefited from this, so I'd best not say anything about it.

"Mikuru-chan, tea!"

"Ah…yes! Right away!"

Asahina-san hurriedly poured the green tea into the cup that had been marked "Haruhi" with a felt-tip pen, and carried it over on a tray.

Haruhi received the teacup and blew the steam off and took a sip. She then spoke like a flower arrangement master berating her disciple for not being diligent enough, “Mikuru-chan, I remember telling you before. Have you forgotten?”

“Huh?” Asahina-san grabbed the tray with trepidation. “W…what is it?” She tilted her head like a Java Sparrow reminiscing over the taste of the seeds it ate the day before.

Haruhi placed her cup on the table.

“When carrying tea over, you need to accidentally trip the tea cup over once every three times! You don’t look like a clumsy maid at all!”

“Ah, erm……s…sorry.”

Asahina-san shrugged her small shoulders. This is the first time I heard of such a rule; does this girl really believe that maids are supposed to be clumsy?

“You’ve got a chance now. Mikuru-chan, go use Kyon as practice. When carrying the tea over, make sure you spill the tea over his head.”

“Huh?”

Asahina-san said then looked at me. I would really like to drill a hole in Haruhi’s head and replace the contents within. Sadly, I would find nothing inside and can only sigh.

“Asahina-san, only someone with a damaged brain could think of something like what Haruhi just said.” So keep up the good work! I had wanted to add that, but decided not to in the end.

Haruhi heard and rolled her eyes.

“That idiot over there, I’m not joking! I’m always serious.” Then that’s even more problematic; you probably need a CT scan. Besides, I wonder if getting mad at you for calling me an idiot means I lack a sense of humor? “Forget it, allow me to demonstrate. Then you follow what I do, Mikuru-chan.” Haruhi leaped off the steel chair and swiped the tray from the stuttering Asahina-san. She then lifted the teapot and began to pour tea into the cup with my name written on it.

As I watched this scene unfold with stunned silence, Haruhi roughly placed the cup on the tray, splashing the tea all over, then stared at where I was sitting and nodded to signal she was about to come over. I promptly picked up the teacup.

“Hey! Don’t get in the way!”

What do you mean don't get in the way? The only people who would gladly sit there and wait for someone to pour hot tea over their heads are either being too nice or are trying to con the insurance company.

And so I stood and drank the green tea Haruhi brewed for me and thought to myself: why is it that even though they brewed with the same tea leaves, Asahina-san's tea tasted so much different from Haruhi's? The answer was obvious even without thinking. The difference between them was a flavouring called "love." If Asahina-san was a white rose blooming in the wild, then Haruhi would be a special breed of rose that doesn't even blossom and is full of thorns; it probably doesn't even have seeds.

Haruhi looked at me with admonishment as I drank my tea.

"Hmph."

She flicked her hair heavily and returned to her seat. The look on her face was as though she had just swallowed some bitter herbal medicine.

Asahina-san gave a sigh of relief and went back to her usual serving mode, pouring tea into Nagato's cup and placing it in front of the reading girl.

Nagato didn't move, keeping her head transfixed on the hardcover book. You should try and express some sort of gratitude! If it were Taniguchi, he'd probably want to wait three days before drinking Asahina-san's tea.

"……"

Nagato flicked the pages without lifting her head. As she's usually like that, Asahina-san didn't really mind and went to prepare her own cup.

At this moment, the fifth member arrived, though no one would really mind if he hadn't come.

"Sorry, I was delayed, since our class meeting was longer than expected." Revealing his charmingly harmless smile and standing by the door is Koizumi Itsuki, Haruhi's mysterious transfer student. His handsome face, which I wouldn't introduce my girlfriend to if I had one, was carrying a smile as usual.

"Looks like I'm the last to arrive. If the meeting's delayed because of me, then I sincerely apologize. Maybe it would be better if we grab a bite first?"

Meeting? What meeting? I never knew of any meeting.

"I'd really have forgotten about it if you didn't mention it." Looking down the table, Haruhi said to me, "I told everyone else about it during lunch break already. I thought I could tell you any time anyway." You had the time to go to other classrooms, yet you never bothered to tell me, who happened to sit right in front of you in the same classroom? "Does it really matter? It's the

same anyway. The issue is not when you get the message, but what we're doing now." That's her way of putting things around. No matter what Haruhi says, I'd never feel any better. This is now common knowledge.

"What's more important, we need to discuss what we need to be doing soon!" Please! Distinguish your present and future tenses! You don't even specify who you are referring to.

"All of us of course! Since this is an SOS Brigade activity." What activity?

"Didn't I just say it? When else can we hold an activity besides during the school festival?" Then it's not a brigade activity, but a school activity. If you really want to make the school festival more lively, then you ought to apply to join the festival executive committee. Then you'll have plenty of menial tasks to take care of.

"That won't be meaningful at all. What we need is an SOS Brigade-styled activity! It took us a lot of work to develop the brigade to its present state! There's no one in this school that doesn't know who we are! Don't you understand?"

What on earth is an SOS Brigade-styled activity? Thinking back on the activities that the SOS Brigade has held for the past six months, I suddenly felt melancholic.

You are only saying whatever pops into your mind, that's easy for you, but do you know how much Asahina-san and I had to suffer these past six months? All Koizumi can do is smile like an idiot, while Nagato couldn't provide much help, you should be more considerate at people like me, who are by your side all the time. Oh, and Asahina-san's probably not normal as well, but since she's so cute, that's fine with me. Because all she needs to do is just stand there and let my eyes savour the scenery and caress the barren field in my heart.

"We need to do something that suits everyone's expectations," Haruhi mumbled, looking unhappy. Speaking of which, just who would expect anything from the SOS Brigade? Now that's something worthy for a questionnaire! The SOS Brigade has not even grown, the number of members has still remained the same, let alone being promoted into an Association. So it's best to maintain the status quo, but sooner or later, the Haruhi Express is going to derail someday. There're only five passengers on this train, at least find a replacement for me. Or perhaps just give me an hourly salary, even 100 yen would do.

Haruhi spent thirty seconds finishing her cup of tea, then asked Asahina-san for a second cup.

"What about you Mikuru-chan? Do you have any plans?" "Umm……You mean our class……We're planning on selling noodles and tea……" "Mikuru-chan is probably a waitress, right?"

Asahina-san widened her eyes.

"How did you know? I had wanted to do the cooking, but everyone else wanted me to……" Haruhi's eyes now looked intrigued, the sort of cunning eyes that are up to no good. Her eyes

drifted towards the hanging rack, making it obvious she's thinking she hasn't had Asahina-san dressed as a waitress yet.

Haruhi's expression was now full of thought.

"What about Koizumi-kun's class?"

Koizumi lifted his eyebrow.

"We've decided to stage a play, but opinions in the class were split. Some wanted an original script, while others wanted a classic play. The school festival's coming up but we're still debating intensely about it. It's going to be some time before things can be decided."

Ah, a lively class sure is so much better, though it can be troublesome.

"Hmm."

Haruhi's eyes now moved towards the remaining unspoken member.

"What about Yuki?"

The alien who loved reading now lifted her head like a badger sensing the rain.

"Divinations."

She replied without any emotion as usual.

"Divinations?"

I now cut in and asked.

"Yes."

Nagato, whose face doesn't even look like it's breathing, nodded her head.

"You're in charge of divinations?"

"Yes."

I can imagine Nagato in a black pointed cap, wearing a black cape and carrying a crystal ball, but then I see a scene where she tells a couple, "You two will break up in fifty-eight days three hours and five minutes."

Couldn't you come up with a better lie? Whether Nagato can predict the future is another mystery I can never know.

Asahina's class is opening a stall, Koizumi's staging a play, while Nagato's class is doing divinations? Why do other classes activities sound so much more interesting than our dull questionnaire activity? Oh yeah, what do you think? Why don't we combine all of the above and have a staged divination tea party play?

"Enough with the idiotic talk, the meeting starts now."

My previous opinion was kicked off cruelly by Haruhi, who walked towards the white board. She pulled the conductor staff until it became as long as a radio antenna and whipped it on the white board.

There's nothing written on it, what do you want me to look at? "There'll be something written in a while. Mikuru-chan, you're in charge of the records. Carefully write down everything I say." When did Asahina-san become the record keeper? I'm afraid no one knows, since Haruhi has just decided that a moment ago.

Asahina-san, tea girl and record keeper, picked up a felt-tip pen and sat by the board, looking up at Haruhi's face.

Haruhi said in an excited tone, "The SOS Brigade is going to make a movie!"

I really don't understand how Haruhi's brain works. It doesn't really matter, since she's always like that. But then this won't be a meeting, but rather an opportunity for her to showcase her personal ideas.

"Hasn't it always been that way?" Koizumi said softly to me, carrying a smile so dashing one has an urge to go draw it. Koizumi elegantly opened his mouth, "Suzumiya-san probably knew what she wanted to do since the beginning, so I don't think there's much to discuss. Did you tell her something you're not supposed to?"

I don't remember telling her anything about movies today. Maybe she saw a terrible C-movie last night and found it too boring and now she's looking for a way to vent her frustration?

Yet Haruhi was convinced her speech has moved the entire audience and looked very excited. "I bet you all have questions right now?"

I only have questions about how your brain works.

"When a TV series ends, they usually end with the main character dying, but wouldn't that be too unnatural? Why would he die right at the end? It doesn't make any sense, so I hate stories where someone dies at the end. I'd never make movies like that!"

Are we talking about movies or TV series?

“Didn’t I just say we’re making a movie? Even the ears of the haniwa figures are larger than yours. Go and memorize every single word of what I just said.”

I’d rather memorize all the station names of the nearby railway than memorize your crap rhetoric.

Asahina-san, who doesn’t look like she’s actually from the Calligraphy Club, elegantly wrote the words “Movie Release” on the board, Haruhi nodded her head in satisfaction.

“That’s about it, you understand now?”

Haruhi talked like a weather forecaster cheerfully predicting that the monsoon rain would be over soon.

“What about it?”

I asked, which was natural of course. I only understood “Movie Release”. Where does she intend to find a movie studio to endorse her movie? Could she have found a studio already?

Yet Haruhi’s dark pupils glittered as she smiled brightly, “Kyon, has your intelligence deteriorated? Of course we are going to make the movie. The movie is going to be shown in the school festival, with the caption ‘SOS Brigade Presents’ at the beginning.” “When did we become the Movie Study Group?”

“What are you rambling about? This will always be the SOS Brigade! I don’t remember any Movie Study Group around here.”

Haruhi callously said something which would probably piss the Movie Study Group if they heard about it.

“This has been decided long ago! There will be no retrial! Further appeals will be rejected!” Since the leader of the SOS Brigade jury says so, I don’t suppose it can be overturned? Just who on earth shoved Haruhi to the SOS Brigade commander throne? No, wait a minute, come to think of it, it was she who claimed the throne for herself. No matter what world you’re in, it’s always the loud and pretentious people that have ever inflating egos. Thanks to this, people like me and Asahina-san, who tend to follow the flow, will always feel confused. This is the conflict of this cold and cruel reality; it is also the truth.

As my mind delved into the philosophical question of what counts as an ideal society……

“So that’s how it is.” Koizumi said, as though he understood everything. He shared his smile equally between me and Haruhi and said, “I understand now.”

Hey, Koizumi, don’t just gracefully accept the bomb that Haruhi just dropped! Don’t you have your own opinions on this?

Koizumi flicked his parting lightly with his finger, “From what I see, we’re making a self-made movie to attract visitors to come watch it. Is that right?”

“Exactly!”

Haruhi whipped her “antenna” on the board.

Asahina-san shuddered, yet she still took the courage and said, “But……why decide to make a movie?” “Last night, I found I couldn’t sleep.” Haruhi brought the antenna before her eyes and swung it like a windscreen wiper. “So I turned on the TV and ended up watching a weird movie. I wasn’t interested at first, but as I had nothing else to do, I decided to give it a look.” Just as I thought.

“That was a really boring movie, so boring I had an urge to make an international prank call to the director’s house; that’s why I came up with this idea.”

The tip of the conductor staff pointed towards Asahina’s tiny face.

“If that kind of movie can exist, then I can definitely make a better one!” Haruhi puffed her chest confidently and said, “That’s why I want to give it a try, do you have anything to say about that?”

Asahina-san shook her head vigorously as if in fear. Even if she did have an opinion, Asahina-san probably wouldn’t say anything, while Koizumi is a nodding yes-man, and Nagato never talks anyway, so the only one doing the talking would always be me.

“You seem determined to be a movie director or producer, that’s fine with us, it’s your choice and you can pursue that dream as you desire. That means we can now go ahead and pursue our own dreams as well.”

“I don’t get what you mean.”

Haruhi had her lips stuck out like a duck. I patiently explained my detailed analysis to her.

“You say you want to make a movie, yet we never said anything about it. What if we don’t like this suggestion? A movie can’t be made with just a director alone.”

“Relax, I’ve come up with a script already.”

“No, that’s not what I meant……”

“There’s nothing to worry about. You just do what I tell you to, so don’t worry.” I’m very worried.

“Let me do the planning, I’ll take care of everything.”

I'm even more worried now.

"Man, you sure are annoying! I'm gonna go ahead with what I said I'm gonna do. The aim is to get first place in the school festival activities poll! Who knows, those ignorant idiots at the Student Council may finally recognize the SOS Brigade as an official club……No! I'll make them recognize us. To achieve this goal, we must bring public opinion to our side first!"

Public opinion and exit polls aren't necessarily in direct proportion with each other, you know.

I tried resisting.

"What about the production costs?"

"If you're talking about a budget, we have one."

Where? I don't believe the Student Council will grant a budget to this underground organization that openly conducts its activities.

"Isn't the Literature Club granted a budget as well?"

"That's the Literature Club's budget! You can't use that!" "But Yuki said it was OK."

Oh boy. I looked at Nagato's face, while Nagato lifted her head in slow motion to look at me, then without saying anything, slowly went back to reading her book.

Won't there be people that want to join the Literature Club? I didn't intend to ask this question, since it's possible that Nagato deliberately arranged for the Literature Club to be on the brink of being canceled. She seems to already know what Haruhi is up to; it'll be a pity if someone else wants to join the Literature Club now. How I wish someone would reclaim the Literature Club from the clutches of Haruhi.

Haruhi didn't notice what I was thinking, waving her antenna in excitement, "Is everyone clear now? Treat this activity as more important than the one at your classes! If anyone has any dissenting opinions, they can tell me after the school festival, OK? The director's orders are absolute!"

Haruhi declared passionately, like a grizzly bear in a zoo holding on to an ice cube during the hot summer. The surroundings no longer concern her.

First she's a brigade commander, now she wants to be a director? What career does she intend to be in? ……And don't tell me you want to be a God.

"That's it for today! Since I need to think of how to choose the cast and crew and find sponsors. There's a lot of stuff involved in making a movie."

I'm not really sure what making a movie involves, but what on earth is she up to? Sponsors? Slam!

A loud noise echoed across the room. I turned and found Nagato closing her book. That sound has now become the unofficial signal for the SOS Brigade to end its business for the day.

"We'll discuss the details tomorrow!"

After leaving this sentence, Haruhi fled the room like a cat hearing a can of cat food being opened. I don't think there are any details left to explain.

"But isn't that fine?"

The only person who would say that is definitely Koizumi.

"As long as it's not hunting for aliens for a circus freak show, or shooting down a UFO and displaying its contents, then I'm relieved."

Where have I heard this before?

The smiling esper covered his mouth and laughed.

"Besides, I'm quite interested in what movie Suzumiya-san is making, I feel I can imagine more or less what's on her mind."

Koizumi glanced towards Asahina-san, who was cleaning the teacups.

"This could be an interesting school festival, it'll be fun." Influenced by him, my eyes also turned towards Asahina-san. Just as we were staring at the headpiece bouncing with her hair……

"Ah! W…what are you looking at?"

Noticing two horny guys staring at her, Asahina-san stopped what she was doing and blushed furiously.

I answered inside my heart.

Oh no, it's nothing. I was just thinking, what costume would Haruhi be bringing this time? Preparing to go home……or rather, simply placing the book into her bag, Nagato stood up silently and headed towards the door. Could Nagato be reading a book about divinations? Because it's written in a foreign language that I couldn't understand.

"But……" I mumbled.

A movie……huh?

To be honest, I'm a bit interested as well, of course my interest is not as deep as Koizumi's, probably just as deep as those marine plankton living off the continental shelf.

Perhaps I should look forward to it?

Since no one else is expecting anything from it.

I take back everything I just said, I don't look forward to anything.

Because after school the next day, I was already suffering.

• Presented by: The SOS Brigade
• Executive Producer / Director / Screenwriter: Suzumiya Haruhi
• Female Lead: Asahina Mikuru
• Male Lead: Koizumi Itsuki
• Supporting Character: Nagato Yuki
• Assistant Director / Cinematography / Editing / Equipment / Information Gathering / Other Menial Tasks: Kyon

When I saw what was written in the notebook, I only thought of one thing, "So what is it exactly that I'm doing?"

"What was written on it, of course."

Like an orchestra conductor, Haruhi waved her conductor staff.

"You're the backstage staff, just as the cast and crew allocation has described. We've got a formidable cast, right?"

"A…am I the lead?"

Asahina-san asked in a soft voice. Today she wore her usual school uniform instead of her maid costume, since Haruhi said she didn't need to change today. Looks like Haruhi's going to bring Asahina-san someplace today.

"If possible, can I just have a minor role……"

Asahina-san pleaded with Haruhi with a sad look.

"No," Haruhi replied. "I'm going to make Mikuru-chan famous, after all, you're like the registered trademark of our brigade. All you need to do is practice signing autographs. Since when the movie premieres, the fans will be queuing up for your signature."

Movie premiere? Where does she intend to hold such an event? Asahina-san doesn't seem too comfortable with this.

"……But I can't act."

"Don't worry, I'll guide you well."

Asahina-san lifted her head in trepidation and looked at me, and sadly lowered her eyebrows.

There were only three of us here right now, Because Nagato and Koizumi had meetings for their classes' festival activities, they were going to be late today. I never thought there would be people who would stay behind after school to prepare these things; I mean, all they needed to do was just sit there and get it over with. I was amazed there were quite a number of people who were serious about it.

"On the other hand, Yuki and Koizumi-kun aren't serious about this," Haruhi said in annoyance. Not knowing how to vent her anger, she pointed her finger at me, "I clearly said this activity takes priority over the rest. Yet they chose to be late so they can attend their classes' activities. I really need to give them a warning."

Maybe Nagato and Koizumi-kun had a better sense of belonging with their classes than Haruhi and I. From a certain perspective, it's actually more strange for the three of us to be here at this time.

I suddenly thought of something.

"Asahina-san, don't you need to attend your class's meeting?" "Um, I'm only on the staff responsible for serving the customers, so all that's left is to design the costumes. I still don't know what costume I'm going to wear, but I'm looking forward to it." Asahina-san blushed and smiled. She already seems used to cosplaying now. Instead of sticking around with the SOS Brigade and being forced to wear all sorts of meaningless costumes without any reasons at all, wouldn't it be better for her to wear something appropriate for the right occasion? It's perfectly normal for waitresses to appear in a noodle stall, more so than a maid in the Literature Club room.

I never knew how Haruhi managed to include that in the discussion topic.

"So, Mikuru-chan, you wanted to dress up as a waitress? Why didn't you say so? That'll make things easy, I'll find a costume for you."

I don't really mind you making these sort of witty remarks, but don't you think that it's inappropriate for people in the Literature Club room to wear all sorts of costumes besides their uniform? Even the nurse costume before was questionable, if she has to wear a costume, I still find the maid costume the best……Is this a personal fetish of mine?

"Oh, all right."

Haruhi turned towards me,

“Kyon, do you know what’s the most important thing when making a movie?” Hmm……Well, I tried to recall every movie scene that has moved me which is worthy for reference. When I finished thinking, I confidently answered, “Innovation and passion?”

“It’s nothing that abstract!”

Haruhi rejected my thinking.

“It’s a camera, of course! How are we going to shoot a movie without one?” You may be right, but I wasn’t talking about something so pragmatic……Forget it, it’s not like I have a lot of innovative ideas or passion for movie making and movie theories, so I wasn’t going to argue.

“It’s decided.”

Haruhi retracted her conductor staff and threw it on the commander’s desk.

“We will now go obtain a camera.”

Thud! The sound of a chair backtracking can be heard. I turned and saw that Asahina-san’s face had gone pale. Can’t really blame her; after all, Haruhi had savagely looted the computer in this room from the Computer Study Group, using poor Asahina-san as a sacrifice.

Asahina-san’s brown hair shivered, she slowly opened her cherry blossom lips and said, “U…umm……S…Suzumiya-san, I just remembered something, I need to go back to the classroom.” “Be quiet.”

Haruhi wore a horrible expression. Asahina-san shuddered and instantly sat back on her chair wearily. Haruhi then smiled gently.

“Don’t worry.”

Just because you said “don’t worry” doesn’t guarantee something worth worrying about won’t happen.

“This time I won’t be using Mikuru-chan’s body as an offering, I only need your help this time.” Asahina-san looked at me with eyes as sad as a calf being sent on a truck to the slaughterhouse. Without shouting loudly, I said to Haruhi, “At least tell us what you want us to help on! Or both Asahina-san and I won’t leave this place.” Haruhi’s expression read, “What’s with these two?”

She said, “I’m going to find a sponsor, it’s easier to make an impression if I bring the female lead along, right? You come too! Since you have to carry the equipment.”

Chapter 2

It's already autumn, yet for some reason, the weather's hardly cool. It's as if the planet has its seasons all wrong and had forgotten to bring autumn over to Japan. The summer heat has now been indefinitely extended, and unless someone comes and hits a home run, it's unlikely this will end soon. Even if it does, one gets the feeling that autumn would still be shoved aside by winter anyway when it comes.

"We might be late already." Haruhi said, so we packed our bags and left the school. Haruhi hurriedly ran along the long winding slope. Just where is she headed? I would understand if we were headed for the Computer Study Group since, after all, we're a mysterious club that has existed for six months without anyone even knowing what the founding principle is. Being driven out would be a logical end for us.

We descended from the hill and rode on the local suburban railway. Three stops later, we've arrived at the area with the cherry blossom path that Asahina-san and I had walked along together at one time. This place contains a supermarket complex and a shopping street, and because of such, is quite a busy and crowded spot.

"Right here."

Haruhi finally stopped and pointed to an electronics store.

"I see," I replied.

She's probably going to blackmail the store for their movie equipment.

I wonder how she's going to do it?

"You two wait here, while I go in and negotiate."

Haruhi shoved her bag at me and walked into the glass-covered store without any hesitation.

Asahina-san hid behind me, constantly peeking at the store, which was illuminated by all the lighting equipment. She was like a shy elementary school kid visiting her friend's place for the first time. As I look at the back of Haruhi, waving her arms and talking to what seemed to be the store manager, my desire to protect Asahina-san became strong. If Haruhi tries anything funny, I'm going to carry Asahina-san under my arms and run off at once.

Through the glass, Haruhi talked and pointed her finger first at the equipment, then at herself, and then at the manager. Meanwhile the manager nodded nonstop. I wonder whether I should warn him to not believe what she says so easily?

After a while, Haruhi turned around and pointed her finger towards us, who were already prepared to escape if anything went wrong. She then gave a warm smile, waved her arms, and continued her presentation.

“What is she doing…?” Asahina-san asked, as she stood behind me, sticking her head out and retracting it again. If even Asahina-san, a time traveler from the future, doesn’t know the answer, then there’s no chance that I would know.

“Who knows? Probably demanding for them to hand her their best digital camera for free.” She’s the sort of person who can do such a thing without even flinching. Since she truly believes herself to be the center of the universe with everything else revolving around her.

“What a bother.”

I remember discussing something similar with Nagato before.

Haruhi believes her values and judgment to be absolute. She does not understand what others think, or realize that they may think differently, or rather, it has never occurred to her that her way of thinking may be completely different from others’ since the beginning.

If people want to achieve time travel, just put Haruhi on a spaceship. Since she probably wouldn’t give a damn about the Theory of Relativity anyway.

As I mentioned this to Nagato, all that the silent alien said was, “Your opinion may be correct.” For Nagato, this is very meaningful. For others, Suzumiya Haruhi is a joke.

“Oh, it seems like they’re done.”

Asahina-san’s whisper brought me back to reality from my daydreams.

Haruhi emerged from the electronics store with a satisfied look, carrying a small box in her arms. There was a picture of the product by the side of the box with a brand name. If I’m not mistaken, that was a camera all right.

Just what threats did she use to intimidate the opposition? Did she threaten to burn the store down? Or maybe start a boycott campaign? Or perhaps to send them prank faxes all night? Or to start a tantrum right there? Could she even have threatened to blow herself up along with the store? “Don’t be ridiculous! I’m not the sort to resort to blackmail!” Haruhi walked along happily, under the glass roof of the shopping street.

“We’ve now completed the first step! This is too easy!”

I was forced to carry the box containing the camera while I followed Haruhi. I looked at Haruhi’s hair flowing behind her back and asked, “How did you manage to obtain such an expensive item? Is it because you discovered the manager’s dirty secrets?”

Indeed, the first words Haruhi said when she emerged from the store were, “We got it!” If the manager was so willing to give things away, I’m willing to queue up as well. So please, tell me the magic words you used!

Haruhi turned and smiled, “It was nothing really! I said I wanted to make a movie and needed a camera, and he said ‘Okay.’ There was no problem at all.”

I felt that even though things were going smoothly now, it wouldn’t end so easily. Could I be worrying too much?

“Don’t sweat the small stuff, just happily be my servant and things will be fine!” Unfortunately, up until now, I still held the uneasy feeling from this spring, of boarding a cruise ship called the Titanic. I wanted to send out an SOS signal, but sadly, I don’t know Morse code, and I’m not the sort of person who can be glad at being called a servant.

“All right! Now for the next store!”

In the bustling crowd, Haruhi waved her arms and strode forward. I exchanged glances with Asahina-san, and then hurriedly followed along behind Haruhi.

Haruhi next visited a toy and model store.

As before, Asahina-san and I were left outside while she went in to negotiate. I was beginning to have an idea of what she was up to, since every time she pointed out towards us, her finger was always directed towards Asahina-san. If I’m guessing correctly, she must be using Asahina-san as some sort of bargaining chip. Asahina-san has yet to realize this, as she was curiously studying a globe on display in the window.

A few minutes later, Haruhi came out carrying a huge box with her. What is it this time? “A weapon,” Haruhi replied, and shoved the box to me. I looked carefully and saw it was a plastic model; it looks like a gun-shaped weapon. What does she want with this stuff? “We’ll need this for the action scenes, the gun fights that is! An intense battle is the basic ingredient for any entertaining movie. If it’s possible, I want to blow up an entire building as well. Do you know where they sell explosives? I wonder if the hardware store has them.” How the hell should I know? At least I know you won’t find them in the convenience stores or on the internet. Maybe they have some in the stone quarry… I had wanted to remind Haruhi of this, but quickly dispelled the thought, mainly because she would probably go there in the middle of the night and steal some dynamite and wires for herself.

I lowered the camera and plastic model boxes and shook my head.

“What should we do with these boxes?”

“You take them home first, and then bring them to the club room tomorrow. It’s too troublesome taking it back to school now.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you.”

Haruhi crossed her arms and gave a benevolent expression. That was a smile rarely seen in the classroom, and reserved only for the SOS Brigade, and every time Haruhi makes such a smile, I always had to take care of the rest. Just what was I to her?

“Excuse me…”

Asahina-san politely raised her arm,

“What should I be doing…?”

“You can go home now, Mikuru-chan. Your work is done for today.” Asahina-san blinked her eyes and had the look some one that had just been possessed by a fox. Since all Asahina-san ever did today was blindly follow Haruhi and me, she probably doesn’t know why Haruhi had asked her to come along, though I could guess what Haruhi was up to.

Haruhi walked energetically like a gym instructor and led us to the station. It seems like today’s Haruhi-ist activity was coming to an end. The loot included a camera and a few toy guns. Rather than by skillful negotiation, Haruhi probably obtained these through very unorthodox means. The expenses were zero. In other words, we got them for free.

There used to be a saying, “There’s nothing more terrifying than not needing to pay.” The thing is, Haruhi doesn’t seem to care. If someone knows something that would make her terrified, please, do let me know.

The next day, besides my bag, I had to carry some excess baggage up the slope.

“Hey, Kyon! What are you carrying? Some present for a certain model student?” Running towards my side is Taniguchi, a classmate of Haruhi’s and mine, a very simple single-celled organism, and as normal a high school student as you can find anywhere. Normal is such a great description for him. Right now, for me, normalcy is a rare commodity since this word represents the magic of the language used in reality.

I hesitated for a while, and then stuffed the lighter of the two supermarket bags into Taniguchi’s arms.

“What the hell’s this, a toy gun? I didn’t know you had such hobbies.” “It’s not my hobby, it’s Haruhi’s.”

I then gave Taniguchi a brief explanation, but Taniguchi was quite right in treating this as an odd hobby.

“I find it hard to imagine Suzumiya breaking this up and then reassembling and preserving it.” I too, found it hard to imagine, so who else besides Haruhi can break up and reassemble these things? I might as well tell everyone that when I was young, I attempted to assemble a toy robot, but no matter how hard I tried, I just couldn’t attach its right shoulder and I threw it away out of frustration.

“You sure have it tough.”

Taniguchi said in a tone that didn’t sound sympathetic at all, “Up to now, the only person capable of protecting Suzumiya has been you. This I can guarantee, so you’d better stick with her.” What the hell are you talking about? There’s no way I would want to stick with Haruhi! The one I should be sticking around with is Asahina-san. I’m sure everyone would feel the same.

Taniguchi giggled like a gremlin.

“Ah, that won’t do, after all, she’s the little angel of North High, the solace for the hearts of all the guys. If you don’t want to be stuffed in a sack by half of the school, I suggest that you’d better watch your step. I don’t suppose you’d like for me to stab you in the back with a knife, would you?”

All right, then I’ll go with the second best and pick Nagato.

“That won’t do either. She may not look like it, but she has a lot of hidden admirers. How come she stopped wearing glasses? Has she switched to contacts?”

“Hmm… why don’t you ask her yourself?”

“Ask? Up to now, no matter how hard I tried, she has ignored everything I’ve said. Everyone in Nagato’s class firmly believes that a single word she says is enough to determine the fate of the day.”

Stop treating Nagato like a god. What sort of superstition is this? She may not be ordinary, but for her standards, she’s actually quite normal. Though I don’t really know what her standards are.

“Anyway, you fit well with Suzumiya. Only you can carry out a decent conversation with that idiot. So keep a good eye on her and minimize the casualties to as low as possible. Oh yeah, the school festival is coming up, what huge event are you guys planning for then?”

“Don’t ask me.”

I’m not the spokesperson for the SOS Brigade, but Taniguchi continued, “Even if I asked Suzumiya, she would just answer with something cryptic, and if I don’t time my question

correctly, I might even get attacked by her. As for Nagato Yuki, you won't get anything out of her no matter what's being asked, while Asahina-san is off limits, as I'll probably be lynched by a mob if I tried to talk with her. So in the end, I had to ask you."

He sure is good at making excuses. According to him, I'm just mister nice guy.

"Aren't you? You look like the sort of person who would continue walking forward with her, even when you know a cliff awaits you ahead."

As we got near the school entrance, I snatched the bag from Taniguchi's arms while looking quite irritated.

I don't know what lies ahead in the midst of Haruhi's madness, but I don't think it can be anything good. Yet, I'm not the only one walking with Haruhi in this perilous journey. There are at least three others with me. Two of them can probably take care of themselves, but Asahina-san would be in great danger since she has no idea what to expect. It's as though she isn't from the future at all. But that's also where her charm lies.

"Which is why," I explained to Taniguchi, "Someone needs to protect her." Ah, that's more like what a male protagonist should be saying. Though I'm just protecting her from Haruhi's sexual harassment. That's all.

I calmly continued, "Since I was given this chance, I have to protect her. I don't care what the rest of the guys in school say, be my guest if you want to form a gentleman's alliance or something like that."

Taniguchi continued to giggle like a gremlin.

"You'd better tread carefully, since every month is a new month." After leaving the sort of blackmail threat a conniving thief would use, Taniguchi walked past the school entrance.

As I carried my baggage and headed towards the corridor outside the classroom, I saw Haruhi stuffing her things into her locker. I proceeded to put the camera equipment and model toy guns into my stainless steel locker as well.

"Kyon, we're gonna be busy today." Without even saying good morning, Haruhi slammed her locker door and gave me a smile as warm as early spring.

"Mikuru-chan, Yuki, and even Koizumi-kun, I won't allow you guys to have any complaints! The movie script in my mind has now neared completion. I can even hear it rumble; now all that remains is to just put it on screen."

"Really?"

I casually replied, and entered the classroom. My seat is the second from last of the row. Since the school term began, we've changed seats many times already, but so far I've never been allocated the seat in the back since Haruhi always ends up sitting there behind me. I'm beginning to feel that it's too unnatural to be coincidental, yet I still wanted to believe that it was all just a coincidence.

If I don't tell myself that, I would lose faith in the word "coincidence," I sure am kind. I'm sure anyone who gets involved with Haruhi would believe the same as I do. I'm like a midfielder in charge of intercepting any ball that's not controlled by either side, while Haruhi is a hyper-attacking striker standing in an offside position and running towards the goal. She's probably so offside that the nearest opponent is miles away, so even if she does get the ball, the linesman would have no choice but to raise the offside flag.

For Haruhi, she'd probably say that's the linesman's mistake. She would say with a straight face that something is wrong with the rules and then proceed to pick up the ball, run past the goal posts, and declare that she's scored a point. If that's the case, I suggest she stay away from rugby.

In order to deal with her inconsiderate attitude, the best way is to just pretend nothing ever happened and quietly leave the crime scene. Or to just give up on struggling and obey whatever she says.

Besides me, most of the classmates have chosen the former option.

So after the sixth session, with one more class to go, Okabe-sensei and the other students all had nothing to say about the seat behind me being empty. Did they not notice? Or did they choose not to notice? Or perhaps they just couldn't be bothered to waste their time worrying about such things? At any rate, everyone has agreed that it's best to leave her alone, so it's no longer important to know why.

I walked towards the clubroom with an ominous feeling, carrying the bag containing the boxes, and stopping before the Literature Club room.

I thought I heard something. The "Ahh's!" are the cute screams of Asahina-san, while the "Waah's!" are the chilling yells of Haruhi. Here we go again.

If I opened the door now, I would probably see very pleasant scenery, but as a man with common sense, I held back my desires and quietly waited outside.

After about five minutes, the soft screams of resistance have finally subsided, as it always ends with Haruhi putting her arms on her waist and smiling victoriously. Like a rabbit that can never defeat a snake, there's no way Asahina-san can ever defeat Haruhi.

I knocked on the door.

"Come in!"

Haruhi's energetic reply echoed through the door. I tried to guess what was contained within the paper bags that she brought this morning, while opening the door, and entering the clubroom. As expected, Haruhi's victorious smile greeted me, but I was already tired of that expression. I turned my gaze towards the person sitting before Haruhi on a steel chair, and I felt my temperature rising instantly.

A waitress was sitting right there, looking at me with watery eyes.

"…"

Her hair a bit messy, the waitress lowered her head and kept silent like Nagato. Haruhi had the waitress's brown hair tied into two ponytails. Amazingly, Nagato was nowhere to be seen.

"So how is it?"

Haruhi snorted and asked me. What's with that face telling me it's all thanks to you? Asahina-san's cuteness is a god-given gift, yet…

I actually think she looks great in this costume. I wonder what Asahina-san thinks? She wouldn't disagree with me having such thoughts, would she? Though, isn't her skirt a bit too short?

Like 100% pure fruit juice, Asahina-san the waitress clutched her hands and placed them tightly on her fists and sat stiffly.

This costume looks perfect on you; it's as if it were made especially for you. Thanks to this, I silently stared at Asahina-san for thirty seconds. Suddenly someone patted my shoulders and nearly had me jumping in fright.

"Sorry about yesterday. We still have to revise the script today, but I insisted on leaving early since I didn't have the opportunity to prepare with you guys from beginning to end yesterday."

Koizumi smiled with his handsome face and then glanced in the clubroom over my shoulder.

"Hi."

He smiled cheerfully.

"This costume…"

Koizumi walked past me, placed his bag on the table and sat down on one of the steel chairs.

"Suits you wonderfully."

He gave his most direct opinion. Well, everyone knows about that. What I don't understand is what is a waitress is doing here in a crummy old room instead of in a cafe or restaurant.

“That’s because,” Haruhi said, “I wanted Mikuru-chan to wear this costume in the movie.” What’s wrong with the maid costume?

“Maids only do certain tasks for the rich in their mansions. Waitresses are different, they appear on the street corner, or in some store, and provide all sorts of services to the mass public at an hourly rate of 730 Yen.”

I don’t know if that hourly rate is considered high or low, but at any rate, I don’t think Asahina-san would dress up as a maid just so she can work in some mansion. It’s a different story if Haruhi actually pays for her services though.

“Stop picking at the small details! It all has to do with how you feel, and I feel this looks good.” You may think so, but what about Asahina-san?

“Umm… Suzumiya-san… I think this costume is a bit small for me…” Asahina-san’s probably worried about her panties showing, since she’s tightly pressing the edge of her skirt down. But doing this only serves to unsettle me further, and before I knew it, my eyes were transfixed upon that spot.

“I think this suits you just fine.”

It took a lot of effort to move my gaze away and fix it towards Haruhi, who was smiling like a beautiful flower blossoming in the middle of a forest. Haruhi aimed her pupils, which can only see what’s before them, to me.

“The concept for our movie this time is…”

She pointed towards Asahina’s shivering back.

“This.”

What do you mean “this”? You want to make a documentary of a girl working part-time in a teashop? “No! There’s not much fun in making a candid camera show of Mikuru-chan’s daily life. We’ve got to make a movie about the daily life of an extraordinary person, only then can the movie be attractive. Making a documentary about the daily life of an ordinary high school student is just satisfying one’s ego.” I don’t think that Asahina-san would be satisfied by making this movie. I believe someone else needs to have their ego satisfied, and I believe that Asahina-san’s daily life is already extraordinary enough, but I decided to keep quiet.

“As the director of the SOS Brigade, I will carry out the mission to entertain the masses. Just you wait! I will make everyone give me a standing ovation!”

Looking carefully, I realized Haruhi’s “Commander” armband had now been replaced with the word “Director.” Such a meticulous person.

An excited female director, a depressed lead actress, and a lead actor smiling enigmatically as though he's only a bystander, I really don't know how to describe this scene. At this moment, the clubroom door opened.

"…"

I thought it was someone else, and for a moment my mind was filled with terror. I thought my short life had finally come to an end, since even Death had come to receive me. I even thought I was in the backstage of the movie where Salieri slowly destroyed Mozart as he composed his Requiem.

"…"

Nagato's usual pale face silently emerged from the doorway. She only showed her face, while her body was shrouded in darkness.

I wasn't the only one frightened into silence, Haruhi and Asahina-san weren't any better, even Koizumi's usual smile carried a bit of fearfulness in it. Nagato was wearing a strange costume that even Asahina-san would feel startled in. She had covered herself with a black cloak, wearing an equally pitch black pointed hat, a recognizable witch outfit.

Under our petrified gaze, Nagato, who was dressed like Death, silently walked to her reserved seat by the corner, took out her bag and hard-back book from under her cloak, and placed it on the table.

Ignoring our stunned glances, she began to read her book.

Looks like this would be the costume used for divinations for her class during the school festival.

Being the first to recover from the shock, Haruhi bombarded Nagato with a series of questions. From her monosyllabic replies, we came to this conclusion: there must be a talented fashion designer in her class to be able to make Nagato enjoy wearing this costume around.

Nagato entered the room in such a terrifying doll-like costume, has she secretly decided to compete with Asahina-san in her own way? Her logic is even harder to understand than Haruhi's!

Under this silent atmosphere which no dared to speak, only Haruhi exclaimed excitedly, "So you've finally got the hang of it, Yuki? This costume is excellent!" Nagato slowly moved her eyes towards Haruhi and then returned her gaze to her book.

"This costume matches exactly with my character concept! Do tell me later who designed this costume for you, I'd like to send him a telegraph to thank him for his efforts!"

Oh please, sending him a congratulatory telegraph would just make him even more suspicious, worrying whether there's some hidden meaning to it. Can't you objectively notice how everyone else thinks of you?

Haruhi was already in seventh heaven. Humming the Turkish Rondo, she opened her bag and took out a few pieces of printed paper. She then handed the papers to each of us, while beaming like Kintarou who had just beaten the black bear.

I had no choice but to direct my gaze towards the piece of paper.

On it was scribbled the following:

"Battle Waitress – The Adventures of Asahina Mikuru (Working Title)"
• Cast
• Asahina Mikuru – the Battle Waitress from the future
• Koizumi Itsuki – the Esper Youth
• Nagato Yuki – the Evil Alien
• Extras – everyone else

……Oh god, what on earth is this? She actually guessed them all correctly.

I was totally shocked. I did not know whether she had amazing skills of deductions, or she simply guessed blindly and got them all correct. I even suspected that she pretended not to know. To be able to make such correct judgments out of the blue, just what kind of power was that?

I was speechless for a moment, and only came to my senses when I heard someone giggling besides me. That could only be Koizumi.

"Oh, I see……"

He seemed rather pleased; I really am envious of him.

"How should I say this? As expected from Suzumiya-san perhaps? Only Suzumiya-san could have come up with such characters, simply amazing."

Don't smile at me like that, you're making me uncomfortable.

Asahina-san gripped the stack of A4 paper with her hands, which were trembling as she stared at the contents.

"Ah……"

She exclaimed softly and looked at me, carrying an expression as though asking to be rescued. I looked carefully and noticed her eyes carried a sense of extreme sadness with a bit of reproachfulness, like a kind big sister berating a young kid for pulling a naughty prank……Ah, now I remember. After what happened six months ago, I told Haruhi about their true identities.

Um, oh dear. Was it my fault?

I frantically looked at Nagato, and saw that the alien-created Living Humanoid Interface, wearing her black cloak and pointy hat……

"……"

Was still silently reading her book.

"It's not that big of a problem."

Koizumi said optimistically, I wasn't even in the mood to laugh.

"I know it's not funny, but it's not all that gloomy."

"How do you know?"

"Because this is only a character allocation for the movie. Suzumiya-san doesn't really believe that I'm an esper, it's only in the fictional movie world that the character Koizumi Itsuki, played by me, happens to be an esper."

Koizumi sounded like a personal tutor lecturing at a student with a short-term memory.

"The Koizumi Itsuki in the real world and this 'Koizumi Itsuki' are two different people. I don't suppose that you would confuse me with the character I play. Even if someone were to confuse between the two, it wouldn't be Suzumiya-san."

"I just can't relax. No one can guarantee that what you say is correct." "If she had confused the real world with a fictional one, this world would have become a science fiction realm already. I've said it before, Suzumiya-san may not look like it, but she does think logically within the confines of reality." Of course I also knew that because Haruhi's way of thinking was always in half-fantasy mode, that was why I always got involved in all sorts of peculiar events. To top it all, the perpetrator Haruhi was not even aware of it herself.

"Because we offered no proof."

Koizumi said calmly,

"Perhaps one day things will develop to an extent where her awareness will become inevitable, but that's not the case now. It's good that the forces Asahina-san and Nagato-san represent think the same way as well, so I believe it's fine if we keep it like this forever."

I thought so too, since I don't want to see the world getting messed up. It would be a pity if the world ends before I could even have a chance of beating the video game that comes out next week.

Koizumi continued smiling,

"Instead of worrying about the world, you should take care of yourself more. It's possible for me and Nagato-san to be replaced with someone else easily, but not you."

In order not to let Koizumi see my now complex thoughts, I pretended to concentrate on loading the toy gun.

Today, Haruhi spent the time having Asahina-san try out the costume, announced the character allocation for everyone, and then called it a day. In fact, she had planned to drag Asahina-san, dressed in her waitress costume, everywhere around school, and then open a press conference to promote her movie. But as Asahina-san was close to tears, I tried everything to make her drop that idea. I told her in this high school, there was no News Society, or Journalist Society, and definitely no Advertising Society. Haruhi looked at me, her lips sticking out like a bird's beak, and looked down and said,

"Yeah, you're right."

I never thought she would back off so quickly.

"It's better to keep things secret until the last moment. Kyon, you're quite smart for your level of intelligence. It'll be troublesome if things were to leak out beforehand."

This isn't some Hollywood or Hong Kong action movie; no one would be interested in stealing your weird ideas.

"Then Kyon, you're responsible for making sure that gun is up and ready by today, because shooting starts tomorrow. You need to learn how to use a camera as well. Oh yeah, you need to look for software that could upload the video clip onto the computer for digital editing, and……"

And so, Haruhi shoved a whole load of work to me and went home humming the tune of "The Great Escape." She really knows how to give people a lot of trouble no matter how they are feeling. Seriously! So right now, Koizumi and I are busy reading the instruction manual and figuring out how to fire the BB bullets from the toy gun.

After changing, Asahina-san went home with her shoulders drooped low. Nagato also disappeared without even taking her bag in that witch costume as though being invited for the Sabbath. Looks like Nagato only came to show us her costume. Judging by her style, there may be some meaning for her to do that, though it's also possible she only came just to visit. She's probably busy doing something in her classroom, like predicting the future with her crystal ball.

I had a feeling the school was getting livelier day after day. Every day after school, the trumpets in the third-rate orchestra stopped going out of tune and began to be in synch; there were also people cutting up plywood and balsa in every hidden corner of the school; while the number of students dressed up in weird costumes like Nagato's was increasing every day.

Yet, this was only a school activity held by a simple prefectural high school, it doesn't seem like it would be a big thrill. In my opinion, only half the school at most were still trying hard to make their school life more enjoyable. Our class, 1-5, on the other hand, had long abandoned trying to have fun at the festival. Those students without any club affiliations would probably have plenty of time to spare by then, and Taniguchi and Kunikida were perfect representatives of the "Go Home After School Club."

"This school festival,"

Taniguchi began.

It was during lunch break, I was hanging out with these two insignificant side characters as we ate our boxed lunches.

"What about the school festival?"

Kunikida asked, Taniguchi revealed a smile that was pathetically hideous compared to Koizumi's elegant smile, "Sure is a super event."

Could you please not sound like Haruhi!? The smile from Taniguchi's face faded suddenly, "Yet it has nothing to do with me, that sure pisses me off." "Why is that?"

Kunikida asked.

"I don't think it's fun at all. And those people that look busy sure tick me off, especially those where the guys are paired with the girls. Makes me want to kill them!"

I guess this is what they call a jealous rage?

"What about our class? Holding a survey? Hmph! That's way too boring! It's just going to be stupid questions about what's your favourite colours! What's the point of collecting such information anyway?"

If you're so dissatisfied, why don't you suggest something else then? Maybe then Haruhi wouldn't have had the time to go make a movie.

Taniguchi swallowed a sausage and said,

“I’m not going to get myself in trouble by making such suggestions. Sigh, I don’t mind making suggestions, it’s just that I would be put in charge of the event if the suggestion is followed.”

Kunikida stopped cutting his rolled cake and said, “You’re right.” “It’s only the foolish that would dare come out with any suggestions, or those with a strong sense of responsibility, like if Asakura-san were still here.” He mentioned the name of the student that had moved to Canada. I would still break a cold sweat every time I hear that name. Though it was Nagato that made Asakura disappear, I was the cause of her departure. I also did nothing to prevent her from disappearing back then, so it’s too late to regret it now.

“Man, this is such a pity,” Taniguchi said, “Why did that perfect, bright student leave us? She was the sole reason I felt grateful for being in this class. Damn, I wonder if it’s too late to request to move to a different class?”

“Which class do you have in mind?” Kunikida asked, “Nagato’s class? Oh, speaking of which, I saw her wandering around dressed like a wizard, just what was that all about?”

Well, I’m not sure myself.

“Nagato, huh……”

Taniguchi looked at me, his face suddenly looked as though he had to face a math pop quiz, and said as though realizing something,

“So when did it begin? I saw you embracing her in the classroom back then. That’s probably one of Suzumiya’s scripts. You did that to scare me on purpose, right? You can’t fool me.”

It’s a good thing Taniguchi misinterpreted the whole thing, the weight on my shoulders was instantly lifted at once. ……Wait a minute, didn’t you come in the classroom because you forgot to bring something? How were we supposed to know you were coming? ……Of course, I didn’t tell him about this. Taniguchi is an idiot, and there’s really no point in telling an idiot that he’s an idiot. Sometimes I’m even grateful that the gods have made Taniguchi an idiot at birth.

“Speaking of which, that sure was nonsense,”

Taniguchi said gratefully, Kunikida was busy eating, while I looked behind me. Haruhi’s seat was empty, just what was she up to now?

“I was looking around the school for places where I could shoot the movie,” Haruhi said,

“But there was no suitable location. There’s just no way we could create any atmosphere inside the school, let’s go outside!”

She may not like the atmosphere in the school, but she didn't have to go through the trouble of finding a lively spot outside just because of that. She seemed determined to make it big.

"Um…… D… Do I have to go, too?"

Asahina-san asked in a terrified tone.

"Of course. We can't be without our star."

"I… In this costume?"

Asahina-san shivered, since like yesterday, today she was again forced to wear that waitress costume, which I have no idea how Haruhi obtained.

"Well, of course."

Haruhi nodded as a matter-of-factly, Asahina-san embraced herself and squirmed.

"Wouldn't it be too bothersome if you have to change all the time? We might not be able to find a place to change there anyway. So you might as well wear that all day, right? C'mon! Let's go!"

"At least let me wear something on top……"

Asahina-san pleaded.

"No!"

"But it's too embarrassing."

"You have to feel embarassed in order to portray that subtle shy feeling! How do you expect to win the Golden Globe like that?"

Wasn't our objective just to win the best event for the school festival? Today everyone in the brigade was gathered in the club room. Koizumi came as well, his class' theatre script being sorted out already, smiling at the one-sided interaction between Haruhi and Asahina-san. Nagato was here as well, though she posed another problem.

"……"

She was silent as usual, that was nothing, but she looked strange today. For some reason, she was again dressed in that wizard outfit that she came to show us yesterday. Actually she could just wear that on the day of the school festival, she didn't have to start wearing it now.

Haruhi looked really fond of Nagato's black cloak and pointed hat.

"Your role is now the 'Evil Alien Magician!'"

In no time she had already altered the script. I watched as Haruhi stuffed into Nagato's hand a conductor rod, which on its tip was fitted a decorative star, the sort usually used to decorate Christmas trees, while Nagato stood motionless. For some reason, even I had no problem with this silent bookworm playing the role of an alien magician. Maybe this role would suit Nagato better than the so-called Integrated Data Entity, because she could indeed wield magical powers, at least for my eyes, so it can't be wrong.

Nagato suddenly pushed up the brim of her hat and looked at me with her expressionless eyes.

"……"

I had concerns about how Haruhi decided on her own to use costumes originally designed for other classes' activities for her movie, but for her, such problems simply do not exist.

"Kyon! Have you prepared the camera? Koizumi-kun, I'm counting on you to carry the equipment there. Mikuru-chan! Why are you still grabbing the table? Hurry up and move on!"

Asahina-san's weak resistance was futile. Haruhi simply grabbed the back of the waitress's collar and dragged her tiny figure towards the door as she whimpered nonstop. Nagato followed behind dragging the tail of her cloak...

Asahina-san's weak resistance was futile. Haruhi simply grabbed the back of the waitress's collar and dragged her tiny figure towards the door as she whimpered nonstop. Nagato followed behind dragging the tail of her cloak, while Koizumi went last, winked at me, and then disappeared into the corridor.

Just as I was thinking whether it was still possible for me to not go……

"Hey! We can't make a movie without a cameraman!"

Haruhi stuck her upper torso in the opened door and yelled loudly at me with her mouth wide open. Seeing the words "Great Director" written on the armband on Haruhi's left arm, I suddenly had an ominous feeling.

It seemed this girl was dead serious about it.

Haruhi the self-proclaimed "Great Director," despite not having any prior directorial experience before, led the way; the cute waitress lowered her head and followed, while the gloomy young witch trailed behind like a shadow. Koizumi carried the paper bags and smiled brightly…… I tried my best to stay as far away as possible while following this eccentric group.

Already capturing the attention of the school as it walked along, this Halloween costume entourage became the focus of attention as it stepped outside of school. Asahina-san walked dejectedly amongst us. After two minutes of walking, she hung her head down low, three

minutes and she was already blushing furiously, five minutes later, she was basically floating on thin air like a depressed ghost.

Haruhi walked ahead beaming brightly as though the heavens are about to shake, humming the theme song of “Heaven and Hell.” I don’t know when she had it prepared, as I saw her carrying in her right hand a yellow loudspeaker, and in her left hand a director’s chair, striding gallantly like the Mongol hordes marching west across the grassy plains. As I was wondering where she was about to strike next, I noticed we had reached the train station. Haruhi bought five tickets and handed one to each of us, then marched on as a matter-of-factly towards the ticket turnstiles.

“Hold it.”

I gave my objection before Asahina-san could even speak. I pointed towards the waitress in a mini-skirt, who was drawing all the gazes from everywhere, and the black cloaked witch, who was standing like a bystander, and said,

“You’re going to let them ride the train dressed like that?” “Is there a problem?” Haruhi pretended not to understand and countered, “If they didn’t wear anything, they might get arrested. But they’re dressed just fine! Or are you thinking that a bunny-girl costume would be better? Then why didn’t you say so earlier? I wouldn’t mind changing the working title to ‘Battle Bunny-Girl!’” This shouldn’t come from someone deliberately bringing a person in a waitress costume…… By the way, I thought you said you had the concept of the movie thought out already? I’m not too sure about this, but can you just alter the concept of the movie whenever you please? I tried my hardest to guess what on earth our director was thinking.

“The ability to adapt to circumstances is vital. That’s how life on earth evolved to this day through survival of the fittest. You’ll go extinct if you stop thinking! We must learn how to adapt in order to survive!”

Adapt to what? If mother nature were sentient, I’m sure the first thing she would do was to drive Haruhi out of the atmosphere of the earth.

Koizumi was reduced to a smiling slave in charge of carrying the equipment, Nagato remained silent, while Asahina-san was too worn out to say anything. In other words, I was the only one doing all the talking.

How I wish someone would think of a way out of this.

It now looks like Haruhi has interpreted our silence as us being moved to deep thought by her speech.

“Ah, here comes the train! Mikuru-chan, let’s go! The show’s about to begin!” Like a police officer dragging a female criminal whose motive was worthy of sympathy, Haruhi pushed Asahina-san’s shoulders towards the turnstiles.

Coming out of the station, I noticed it was the station we had been to the other day, as the shopping street was right ahead. Before I could even suspect, I realized Haruhi had even come to the exact same store that she had visited. It was the electronic store where she managed to obtain the camera.

“I came as promised!”

Haruhi entered energetically, the owner stuck his head out and landed his gaze onto Asahina-san.

“Hoho.”

The owner stared at the lead actress with a horny looking smile, while Asahina-san stood stiff like one of those combat game characters who had just used up all her special moves. The owner then said,

“She’s the girl from the day before? She really looks different today, hoho. Then we’re counting on you.” Counting on what? I had instinctively wanted to move forward one step and shield Asahina-san, who was trembling, behind my back, but I got pushed back by Haruhi before I could do that.

“The meeting will now begin, everyone listen up.”

With the same smile that she had after winning the inter-class relay race during sports day, Haruhi announced,

“We shall now start shooting the commercials!”

“T… the owner of this store, um, he’s very generous and kind. This store has been opened by the owner Eijirou-san’s grandfather, and they sell everything from dry batteries to refrigerators. Oh, and…… um……”

The waitress smiled stiffly as she tried her best to read from the script, while Nagato stood beside her holding up a plastic banner that read “Oomori Electronics.” The two of them were now captured into the viewing window of my camera.

Asahina-san gave a very clumsy looking smile, carrying a microphone that was not even plugged in.

Koizumi stood beside me and smiled wryly as he carried the placards with the script written on them. The placards were basically a sketch book in which Haruhi wrote the script without even thinking a while ago. Koizumi flipped the pages of the sketch book in accordance with Asahina-san’s reading speed.

We stood outside the entrance to the electronic store, which was right in the middle of the shopping street.

Haruhi sat on the director's chair crossing her legs, and frowned at Asahina-san's acting.

"OK, cut!"

She slapped her loudspeaker onto her palm and said,

"That was entirely devoid of any emotion. Why can't you convey it? There's just no feeling of 'that's it.'" She said while biting her nails.

Looking stunned, I stopped recording. Clutching the microphone with both her hands, Asahina-san also stopped what she was doing. Nagato was motionless since the beginning, while all Koizumi could do was smile.

The pedestrians walking on the shopping street have now gathered behind us out of curiosity.

"Mikuru-chan, your expression was too stiff. You need to smile more naturally from the bottom of your heart. Think of something happy, aren't you happy right now? You're chosen as the female lead after all! There can't be anything happier than this in your whole life!"

I really wanted to just tell her, Stop being ridiculous already! If I had to compress the conversation between Haruhi and the store owner into two lines, I believe it would be like this: "During the shooting of the movie, we'll make a commercial for this store as well. So can you lend us a camera?" "Sure, no problem."

The owner was deluded to actually believing Haruhi's sweet words, while Haruhi was simply nuts to think of putting a commercial inside a movie. I had never seen a movie where the female lead had to become a spokesperson for a commercial product. I wouldn't have minded if it were just simple product placement by shooting the name of the store in the background of some scenes, but now we're shooting an advertisement instead of a movie.

"I know!"

Haruhi suddenly shouted. What is it that you know now!? "It just feels strange to see a waitress coming out of an electronic store." Maybe it's because of the costume you chose?

"Koizumi-kun, give me that bag. The smaller one over there." Haruhi received the paper bag Koizumi handed her, then grabbed the dreamy Asahina-san by the hand and strode towards the store.

"Manager! Is there a place where you can change? Um, anywhere would do. Even the bathroom. Really? Then we'll use the storeroom!"

Without even flinching, she then dragged Asahina-san and disappeared into the store. Poor Asahina-san didn't even have the strength to resist, and could only follow awkwardly as she got dragged by Haruhi's incredible strength. Maybe she was prepared to do anything Haruhi asked as long as she could get out of that costume.

Koizumi, Nagato and I were left standing outside with nothing to do. Nagato wore her black costume and continued to hold up her plastic banner while staring at the camera. It's quite amazing that her arms never get tired.

Koizumi smiled softly at me.

"It seems like I won't be performing anytime soon. I was only in the class play because everyone voted to have me in, it's already exhausting trying to memorize all the lines, so I do hope there aren't that many lines for this role I'm playing. ……How about it? Why don't you try being the male lead?"

Haruhi's the one who decides who plays what, so you'll have to go ask her.

"Do you think I am capable of taking on such a frightening task? I dare not imagine an actor telling the executive producer and director what to do, since Suzumiya-san's orders are absolute. I don't even want to think what retaliatory moves she would have against me if I did that."

Well, neither do I! Are you saying that's the reason why I'm willing to be a cameraman? Besides, we aren't even shooting a movie, but a regional advert for a local store. There's a limit to showing your sense of belonging to the neighbourhood.

I'm guessing a frantic scene was being played right now at the back of the store. I can imagine the look on Haruhi's face as she strips the clothes off a defenseless Asahina-san. I wonder what she would have Asahina-san wear this time, why doesn't she wear them herself? Her figure is just as stunning as Asahina-san's anyway, has she never thought of starring in the movie herself?

"Sorry to keep you waiting!"

Of the two people coming out of the store, Haruhi remained in her uniform of course, while the sight of the other instantly gave me a trip down memory lane. Has it been six months already? How time flies by! So many things have happened since then! Amateur baseball tournament, lone island mansion…… Now that I think about it, these have all become happy memories. ……How was this possible?

That was Asahina-san's debut performance, the one that made Asahina-san and Haruhi the talk of the school instantly. It was the extremely revealing costume that left Asahina-san emotionally scarred.

The impeccable, perfect bunny-girl blushed bright red with tears in her eyes, and followed timidly behind Haruhi as her bunny ears swung to and fro.

“Yes, now that’s perfect. It’s better after all to do an advertisement in a bunny-girl costume,” Haruhi said ambiguously and studied Asahina-san, giving a satisfied smile. Asahina-san simply looked traumatized, as though half of her soul had flown out of her half-opened cherry red lips.

“Mikuru-chan, let’s start over again. You’ve memorized the script already, I’m sure. Kyon, roll the tape.” Who would have the mood to listen to her when she’s dressed like that? When this movie plays, I’m sure the audience would be paying attention to the bunny-girl played by Asahina-san instead. It would be fortunate if the screen didn’t get burned by the staring gazes of the audiences.

“And, take 2!”

Haruhi yelled and slapped her loudspeaker sharply.

Finally, the shooting of the electronic store advertisement starring Asahina-san, who was smiling and crying at the same time while being toyed around by Haruhi, was complete. The whole thing felt like watching a foreign wrestler being manipulated by an evil agent in every match.

But, having gotten to this point, I realized we had visited another store before. I didn’t even need to speculate, as Haruhi was already thinking of making a commercial for them as well.

Asahina went “Ah~!” and “Kyaa~!” cutely as she got dragged along by Haruhi down the shopping street. Meanwhile Nagato followed slowly behind Koizumi and me like a phantom in her usual flat wizard expression.

I placed my jacket over Asahina-san’s exposed back, trying to console her. Perhaps doing so only increased the attention from the onlookers even more. After all, this world is populated by people with strange tastes. Let me make it clear by the way, those are not my tastes.

We went to the second model toy store and repeated what we had done before. Under the watchful eyes of the curious bystanders, Asahina-san looked tearfully at me – the lens of the camera, that is.

“Th… This model toy store was opened by Yamatsuchi Keiji-san, age 28, who ignored the objections of his parents and left his life as a white-collar worker…… In order to fulfill his dreams…… As expected, the sales didn’t grow as planned. Sales for the first half of this year was only 80% of last year’s, and the sales curve have fallen towards the lower right corner of the chart…… That’s why… Please do come and take a look around!”

Asahina-san’s speech was totally unconvincing. Would the owner Yamatsuchi-san even accept such an advertisement? He would probably be even more dejected than he was now. Who would want to be treated to such a speech by a high school student anyway?

The bunny-girl was now being forced to aim the model rifle she was holding upwards.

“Please don’t aim this at people, try it on empty cans instead!” Nagato stood behind staring blankly forward, holding up a plastic banner that read “Yamatsuchi Model Store.” It was such a surreal sight. As Asakura Ryoko looked like a normal person with emotions, that meant not all the alien-created humanoid interfaces behaved like robots. I think Nagato only behaved like that simply because she was programmed that way in the beginning.

Asahina-san now aimed the rifle towards the empty cans laying on the ground and fired at them.

“Ah! I think this would hurt if you get hit! Ahhh~~!!!”

Asahina-san yelled timidly as the aluminum cans slowly became dented like a beehive. This shooting demonstration caused a commotion among the bystanders, though Asahina-san’s aim accuracy was only 1%.

Somehow I just felt that shooting all these scenes into the DV recording camera was a complete waste. I felt sorry for both Asahina-san and the guy that designed this camera, since this camera wasn’t supposed to be made to shoot such silly scenes.

And so the day ended after shooting of the stupid commercials had ended.

We returned to school first to listen to Haruhi announce the upcoming shooting schedule.

“As tomorrow, Saturday, is a holiday, everyone must come early. We meet at nine in front of Kitaguchi Station, you hear?”

But, the commercials alone were already 15 minutes long. Just how long was the movie going to be? No one is going to be able to finish a three-hour movie shown in a school festival, and I’m not optimistic about the box-office receipts either.

I thought this to myself while noticing how depressed Asahina-san was. She rode the train dressed as a waitress when going out, and returned as a bunny-girl. Right now, changed back into her uniform, she now knelt on the ground looking completely worn out. At this rate, the female lead is going to fall asleep during shooting.

I finished drinking the genmaicha that Koizumi made in place of Asahina-san, who rested her head on the table looking tired, and said,

“Haruhi, can’t you think of any other costumes Asahina-san can wear? Aren’t there any other battle costumes that suit the occasion better? Like some military costumes or cheerleader costumes?”

Haruhi waved her conductor rod fitted with a star at its end and said, “There’s no originality in wearing such costumes. It is only by dressing as a waitress that the audience can go ‘Ooohhh~~~!’ It’s important to grasp what the audience is thinking. That’s what they call

concept!" I really wonder whether she even understood what a concept is, as all I could do was sigh.

"Forget it…… Let's leave that aside. Why must the female protagonist be set as coming from the future? I don't see what difference it makes to the story!"

Asahina-san shuddered a bit while lying on the table. Haruhi didn't notice that, obviously she's not giving up, "We'll consider that sort of stuff later, we'll worry about it when someone voices a concern." Didn't I just voice a concern!? Answer the question!!!

"If an answer can't be thought out after consideration, then it's best to leave it alone! It doesn't matter anyway. What matters is that it's interesting!"

Provided you can make it interesting. What are the chances of you making a movie that's interesting? What's the point in making a movie for which only the director feels an interest? Are you trying to get nominated for the Golden Raspberry Awards?

"What on earth's that? I only have one objective, that is to get voted the best event of the school festival! If possible, I wouldn't mind getting a Golden Globe. In order to achieve that goal, it's important that Mikuru-chan wears the right costumes!"

I don't see how anyone could fret over such stuff. I have a feeling Haruhi was compelled to do this after getting pissed off watching a crap movie that somehow won the Golden Globe awards.

I sighed again and looked towards the side. Dressed all in black, Nagato had returned to her corner in the club room and once again was indulging herself in her world of books. What was wrong with her? Would she die if she wasn't reading something in this room?

"Hang on."

Looking at the alien who loved reading, I suddenly thought of something, "Hey, I still haven't seen the script yet."

It's not just the script that's missing, I don't even know what the story is. All I knew was that Asahina-san was a waitress from the future, Koizumi was an esper youth, while Nagato was an evil alien magician.

"It's not necessary."

Just what was Haruhi thinking!? She suddenly closed her eyes and pointed to her forehead with the star on her conductor's staff,

"Because e~~verything is in here, the script and the storyboard. You don't have to worry about anything, I'll think of all the scenes that need to be filmed for you."

A bold statement. You should be the one who need not do any thinking and can just stare out the window. If you looked a bit more gentle and serious, you could compete with Asahina-san with no problem at all.

“Tomorrow guys! Let’s march bravely forward. In order to obtain glory, one must start on the mental side. It is the fastest way to victory without ever spending any money! When you free yourself from the cage of your mind, you’ll be able release your potential that you never even knew you had. That’s the way!”

That would probably work in those combat comics, but no matter how hard you try to spew out how to control your state of mind or how to go international, it’s still going to be a long way before the Japanese soccer team could win the World Cup.

“That’s it for today! Let’s look forward to tomorrow! Kyon, don’t forget the camera, equipment and costumes. Be punctual everyone!”

Haruhi then grabbed up her bag with all her force and bolted out of the room. As the humming of the “Rocky” theme song diminished down the corridor, I looked resentfully at the pile of equipment that I had to carry. Just to which society do I complain about the tyrannical actions of this director?

So far today, our school life had been as normal as it gets, just that it got spiced up, to the level of nearly losing control, by Haruhi’s over-enthusiasm in the making of her movie. If a survey were conducted on the high schools on the whole nation, I’m sure there are other people who are just as eccentric as us. In other words, they’re all living a “normal” life.

I wasn’t attacked by Nagato’s people; I didn’t go time traveling with Asahina-san; and I didn’t encounter any giants that shone like a glowing piece of blue mold; lastly, I never experienced any murder mysteries with a ridiculous truth hidden inside.

It was a normal school life.

As the school festival approaches, Haruhi’s excitement was now reaching boiling point. The endorphins in her mind now spin as quickly as a hamster on an exercise wheel, whipped to run at near Mach speed.

Anyway, all that was normal.

……So far, that is.

Thinking carefully, I'm sure Haruhi had probably began to control herself in her own way. Thinking further, I realized we hadn't even shot a single frame for the movie. All that the digital camera contained were video clips of Asahina-san dressed as a bunny-girl advertising for the local electronics and toy model stores. The SOS Brigade movie directed by Haruhi did not even have a framework; even the story was a mystery.

Perhaps it was better if it remained a mystery.

Even if we ended up showing a documentary of Asahina-san introducing the shops in the local shopping district, it would not be a problem at all. Actually, wouldn't this sort of movie attract audiences better? Besides, it's beneficial to the local economy of the shopping district, so that's two birds with one stone. Ah yes, let's make an Asahina Mikuru advertisement special! I think I'd like this better. As her cameraman, I mean what I say.

But, knowing Haruhi better than anyone, she's not going to be satisfied with that. She's going to press on, doing what she said she intends to do. She's not the sort of person to give up halfway. Such a troublesome girl who sticks to her principles!

And so, from the second day onwards, we once again found ourselves in a strange and dire situation. I don't know how to describe this… How did Haruhi phrase it again?

When you free yourself from the boundaries of your mind, you'll be able release your potential that you never even knew you had. ……Something like that.

Makes sense.

But, Haruhi,

Why is it that you are the only one whose potential got released? And you aren't even aware of it yourself.

Chapter 3

Saturday came.

We were to meet at the station. When I arrived carrying all the equipment using the largest backpack I could find in my house, I discovered that the other four were already waiting for me.

The sight of Haruhi in her casual clothes and Asahina-san in her usual cuteness was just as captivating as usual. They looked like a pair of mismatched sisters. Asahina-san, who looked more like the younger sister despite being older, wore some mature styled clothing.

Surrounded by three weird people, Asahina-san breathed a sigh of relief as she saw me and nodded while waving at me. Ah, that feels good.

“You’re late!”

Haruhi may be yelling at me, but she was obviously quite happy. The reason her hands were empty was because she had stuffed the loudspeaker and director’s chair into my baggage as well.

“It’s not even nine yet,”

I frowned and said. I looked aside and saw Nagato’s porcelain statue-like expression and Koizumi’s relaxed smile. Speaking of which, today’s a holiday. While it was normal for Nagato to still wear her uniform as she always did, why was Koizumi wearing his uniform as well today?

“This is my costume for the movie, apparently,”

Koizumi replied,

“She told me that yesterday. I will be playing an esper disguised as a high school student.” Isn’t that what you are!?

I put down the bags which were stuffed with the camera and all the other shooting equipment and wiped the sweat off my forehead. Haruhi showed an excited face like an elementary school kid ready to set off on a field trip and said,

“Kyon, you’ll have to pay a fine since you’re the last to arrive, but not now. Right now, we need to ride the bus. I’ll be paying for the fares, as that’s part of the expenses anyway, but you’ll have to treat everyone to a meal.”

After unilaterally making this decision, she waved her hand, “Everyone! The bus stop is this way! Follow me!”

I now noticed the armband on her arm was now labelled “Ultra Director.” Looks like Haruhi thinks she’s above even a Great Director. Was she about to make an awesome movie?

Let me clarify once more, I still believe making an Asahina-san video special would be more fun than this.

After a bumpy thirty minute bus ride we got off at the bus stop at the bottom of the hill. We then spent another thirty minutes arduously climbing up the mountain path.

We arrived at a forest park such as can be found anywhere in the countryside. This was a place I was very familiar with ever since I was in elementary school, because every year when it comes to going out on a field trip, we always end up going hiking at the nearest mountain.

This was only a park in name, since all the authorities did was open up an empty patch on the hill and build a fountain over it. It was so empty that I can't help but wonder why on earth did I climb so high here anyway. It's only the little kids, having no concept of what entertainment is, who feel happy coming here. And bringing those little kids here were most likely their parents.

Using the fountain in the center of the plaza as a starting point, we decided to make this our base for today's filming. Haruhi, who was empty-handed, had an unlimited amount of energy oozing out, while I was nearly worked out like a dog. If I hadn't shoved half of my baggage to Koizumi, I was sure I would be lying dead on the mountain path already. So, once we arrived at the park, I leaned against the equipment bag which was mainly used for backpacking journeys, trying to catch my breath.

"Would you like a drink?"

A plastic bottle appeared before my eyes. Asahina-san was holding it.

"I drank half of it already, so if you don't mind……"

As this Oolong tea was made by the gods, it must be as sweet as all the heavenly elixirs combined. This has nothing to do with whether she had drunk of it or not, because I would probably be condemned if I refused this. Before I could gracefully accept this gift, a hand from the evil devil pushed off the hand of the angel, as Haruhi grabbed the Oolong tea from Asahina-san and said,

"Leave this for later! Mikuru-chan, now is not the time to give water to these servants in charge of menial tasks. If we don't start soon, we'll be wasting all this good weather. So let's start the filming already."

Asahina-san opened her eyes widely,

"Eh……? Right here?"

"Of course. What did you think we came here for?"

“But don’t I have to change? There’s nowhere here I can change……” “That won’t be a problem. Look, everywhere is full of these.” Haruhi’s finger was now pointed towards the green forest surrounding the park.

“No one would come if you change in the forest, it’s like a natural changing room. Come on, let’s go!” “Eh?…KYAA~~!!! H…HEEEEEELP~~!!!”

Before any help could be rendered, Asahina-san was dragged away by Haruhi and they disappeared into the forest.

Asahina-san reappeared wearing her lively waitress costume, with two ponytails tied behind the back of her head. Her eyes looked shyly at the wild flowers growing by the side of the road.

One of her eye colors looked very strange, truly. Only her left eye was blue, just what was in her eye? “That’s a colored contact lens,”

Haruhi explained,

“Having different colors for each eye is also an important factor. Just look at her, isn’t her aura of mystery even greater now? All it takes is a little trick. That’s a hint!”

She grabbed Asahina-san’s chin from behind her back and tilted her little face slightly sideways. Asahina-san can only look perplexed while being toyed around by Haruhi.

“There’s a secret hidden with this blue eye,” Haruhi said.

“Because if we don’t provide any meaning to this, then there’s no big deal in having different colored eyes.” Seeing Asahina-san’s exhausted, worn-out look was already quite a big deal.

“Then what’s the secret with that colored contact lens?” “Right now it’s still a secret.”

Haruhi smiled and replied.

“Hey, Mikuru-chan! How long are you going to daydream for? You’re the star of the show! Your greatness is only second to that of the executive producer and director! Now straighten your back!”

“KYAA~~!”

Asahina-san made an eerie scream, and was forced by Haruhi to make a pose. Next, Haruhi made Asahina-san carry a gun (a toy gun, that is).

“Show the feel of a female assassin! Make people strongly feel you’re from the future!” Haruhi began making all sorts of unreasonable requests, while Asahina-san tried frantically to make all

sorts of poses towards me – the camera that is. She didn't really need to work this hard. Seriously.

In the meantime, Haruhi has shown an abnormally high amount of enthusiasm in this. I too have seen movies that bored the hell out of me. But never once did I think "I could do better than that," and then proceed to try and make a movie myself, and I don't even know how a movie is made anyway. Even if I did shoot a movie, I don't believe I could make it any better myself. Yet, Haruhi really thinks she has the talent to be a director. At least she believes she can make a movie better than the cheap B-movies shown on late nights. Just where did such confidence come from?

Haruhi waved her yellow loudspeaker and yelled,

"Mikuru-chan! Don't be so shy! Set yourself free! Immerse yourself into the character's role and you'll do fine! Right now you're the female protagonist Asahina Mikuru!"

……Of course I knew there was no basis for Haruhi's confidence. She was born with that groundless confidence, which causes the world to constantly fall into chaos. Otherwise she wouldn't be wearing such a ridiculous armband and smiling so boastfully.

Under the instructions of Haruhi the director, we began the filming of the memorable "Action 1." The scene was named as such, but all it involved was me carrying a camera and filming Asahina-san running across the plaza. I was told this was the opening scene. I felt we should at least have a script, but Haruhi said as a matter-of-factly that there was no such thing.

"It would be troublesome if what we wrote gets leaked out." That was her reason. It looked as though she was going along the style of those Hong Kong action movies (making it up as you go along). To be honest, I was already exhausted, but compared to Asahina-san, who had to run breathlessly carrying two guns in her hands, my situation wasn't too bad.

Under our watchful gazes, Asahina-san continued to run, wavering left and right along the way. It wasn't until after "Action 5", when the director signalled an "OK" gesture, that she slumped tiredly onto the ground.

"Huff…… huff……"

Ignoring the waitress who put her hands on the ground, catching her breath, Haruhi turned and gave her orders to Nagato, who had been waiting aside all this time,

"We now begin the battle scene between Yuki and Mikuru-chan." Wearing her favorite black costume, Nagato stepped in front of the camera. As all she did was put a black cloak over her uniform and wear a black pointed hat on her head, she didn't have to be dragged out to the forest to change, so she should count herself lucky. But Nagato looked like the sort of girl who wouldn't flinch a bit no matter where she changed. I wonder what it would be like if their roles

were switched? With Nagato as the waitress while Asahina-san would be the magician. It would be a surreal sight, but it sounds good.

Haruhi had Asahina-san and Nagato stand three meters apart facing each other.

“Mikuru-chan, I want you to shoot mercilessly at Yuki.”

“Eh?” Asahina-san looked shocked. She shook her untidy hair, which was messed up after running for so long, and said, “But we can’t use this to shoot people……”

“Don’t worry! Mikuru-chan, you’re bound to miss anyway with your skills. Even if you do shoot on target, Yuki would be able dodge easily.”

Nagato stood still, silently holding the rod with a decorative star attached to its end.

I thought to myself – even if you were to pull the trigger on Nagato at point blank range, she would still be able to dodge it faster than the speed of lightning.

“Well……”

Asahina-san looked timidly at Nagato like a rookie waitress who had just broken a plate and was reporting to a scary looking chef.

“It’s fine…” Nagato replied, then spun the rod in her hand, “…go ahead and shoot.” “Mikuru-chan, even Yuki says she’s fine with it, so fire all you like. Let me just make this clear, don’t fire both guns at the same time, but one by one alternately! That’s the basic skill of a double-barrelled gunman.”

Koizumi lifted the light reflector board high above his head, I had no idea where Haruhi got her hands on this one. The Movie Club was probably reporting a theft to the police right now. By the way, Koizumi, aren’t you supposed to be the male lead?

“I’m not confident of adapting to any changes that would come along during filming, so instead of being filmed, I much prefer doing this. Yesterday I’ve been wondering, can’t I just remain as a backroom crew……”

“Huh?”

Asahina-san carried a bulky model machine gun and fired ceaselessly with her eyes closed. Standing aside, I had this scene recorded into my camera. I wasn’t able to see clearly where the BB bullets went, but from the sight of Nagato standing still without even flinching, it seems she wasn’t even hit. Was it because of her magic…… When I began to suspect that, Nagato slowly lifted her wand, she then waved it swiftly and the bullets just fell on the ground in clinking sounds. She wasn’t wearing her glasses, yet her keen eyesight continues to amaze me.

Nagato never moved her gaze away from the gun. She was unusual like that, it's as though she wasn't aware, "It wouldn't be natural if I don't blink," yet she was only making herself stand out even more. I don't think I would be surprised whether she walks without blinking or smashes through the ceiling and moves instantaneously. So I wasn't at all fazed by that.

Nagato was like a broken windshield wiper, swinging her wand occasionally. Every time she waved her wand, the BB bullets would make a clattering noise as they hit on the ground.

But, this was a pretty monotonous battle scene. Nagato was busy waving her wand, while Asahina-san simply fired the two guns on her hands, without a single bullet hitting its target, as Haruhi only told her to "fire all you like," she didn't even provide a script. The only lines of dialogue I could hear were Asahina-san going "Ah~~! Kyaa~~!! It's so scary!!"

When Asahina-san used up all the bullets in her guns, Haruhi tapped her shoulder with her loudspeaker. I put down my hand-held camera and walked towards Haruhi, who was sitting on the director's chair,

"Hey, Haruhi. Just what kind of movie is this? I don't see any story in it at all." The Ultra Director glanced at me and said,

"It doesn't matter, since I plan to edit the scenes during post-production anyway." Who's going to do that? I meant the editing of course. Of course, I did sort of remember part of my duties involved editing.

"At least have some sort of dialogue!"

"When there's a problem, we'll just remove the background sound and dub them over during editing. We'll add the sound effects and background music as well then. We don't have to worry about those now!"

Now that I think about it, as the story only exists in your head, there's no room for us to do any thinking anyway. But I must at least make sure that Haruhi's sexual harassment of Asahina-san gets reduced to a minimum, as well as forbidding any other guys besides myself to touch her body. That's my bottom line, surely no one has a problem with that, right?

"Now for the next scene! Yuki's counter-attack. Yuki, use your magic and attack Mikuru-chan with all your might!"

Nagato didn't move, save her dark eyes staring out at me from under her black hat, and tilted her head in an angle only I could notice. I think Nagato was trying to ask me "Is it really OK?"

The answer was of course "No." There was no way I would let anyone injure Asahina-san in any way, let alone by magic. Just look at Asahina-san, don't you see her trembling with a pale face already?

Of course Haruhi had no idea Nagato could wield such incredible magic, I think what she meant was to have Nagato perform something that looks like magic.

Nagato seemed to understand what I thought of as well, she said nothing and lifted her wand, then waved it like how fans in a pop concert would wave their fluorescent tubes.

“Forget it,” Haruhi said, “I’ll add in the visual effects later on. Kyon, remember to create effects that has rays coming out from Yuki’s wand during post-production.”

How should I know how to make such visual effects? It would be a different story if we could borrow some assistance from Industrial Light & Magic, though.

“Mikuru-chan, scream in agony and then fall on the ground looking tormented.” Asahina-san hesitated for a moment, then she then muttered “……AH” and fell forward face down with her hands lifted up. Standing besides her was Nagato, like the God of Death who had just claimed Asahina-san’s soul. I had this scene recorded, while Koizumi stood beside me holding the reflector board.

The staring glances of the bystanders who had been standing around us now felt like needles on my back.

Haruhi finally decided to have mercy on us and granted us a break. We all sat down together on the ground exhausted.

Haruhi rewound the video I just recorded and played it again, muttering something to herself with a concerned look.

A few curious kids ran towards Asahina-san and Nagato and asked, “What TV program is this?” Asahina-san could only smile weakly and shake her head, while Nagato had completely ignored their presence and blended in with the background.

From beginning to end, Haruhi never once explained what the scenes that we shot were going to come out as. So I was completely in the dark when the Ultra Director announced that our next location would be the shrine nearby. Was the break over already!?

“There’re pigeons there,”

Haruhi said,

“We need a scene of Mikuru-chan running with doves flying in the background! If possible, I’d prefer all the pigeons to be white, but I guess I can’t be picky now.”

I guess we’ll just have to find some domestic pigeons. Haruhi wrapped her arm around an already exhausted Asahina-san’s arm (probably to prevent her from escaping), and walked

through the forest park towards the main road. I carried the equipment with Koizumi and followed them, like the local sherpas hired to handle the baggage of a filming crew sent to do a documentary. We arrived at a large shrine in the middle of the mountain. It's been a while since I last came, not since a field trip in elementary school.

Haruhi stood in front of a sign that says "Don't feed the pigeons," she then began to openly throw bread crumbs around like a gardener determined to make the wilting flowers blossom again. All I could say about this is that she's probably illiterate.

Nearly covering the ground completely, the swarm of pigeons now gathered over at once, and more landed from the air. A shrine that is covered by feathers just doesn't feel comfortable at all. Asahina-san followed instructions and stood within the sea of pigeons. Standing in front of the waitress, I recorded her legs being pecked at by various beaks as her lips shivered nonstop. Just what was I doing?

Haruhi stood offscreen carrying the gun Asahina-san had been holding and clicked off the safety switch. Before I could wonder what she was up to, she suddenly began shooting like mad towards the side of Asahina-san's legs.

"KYAAA~~!!!"

Asahina-san's terrified look was so real, I've never seen such an expression before. Due to Haruhi's insane action, which was enough to drive the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals into a fit of rage, the symbols of peace were now goggling and flying off all at once after such a scare.

"That's it! That's the scene I want! Kyon, make sure you get it all in!" The camera's rolling, so it should be working, right? Standing among the torrent of flying pigeons, Asahina-san squatted down and covered her head with her hands.

"Mikuru-chan! Why are you squatting? You need to use the flying pigeons as a background and run towards here! Hurry up and get up!"

Looks like now was not the time to idly shoot a movie, as instead of the SPCA, an old geezer that seemed like the shrine priest now bolted out from the interior of the shrine. He was dressed in hakama, which would suggest he had something to do with the priest. I was already prepared to be berated by him when Haruhi, without hesitation, used her secret weapon.

She fired her CZ (or was it SIG) toy pistol towards the old geezer. I then saw the image of a priest (I think he's one) who seemed to be dancing non-stop on the sizzling hot ground. There's no doubt the Respect for the Elderly Society would protest strongly.

"Retreat!"

Haruhi yelled and then ran off at once. As for Nagato, I don't know when she left, as she was already waiting for us by the torii far ahead. Seeing as Asahina-san won't be able to escape

quickly, Koizumi and I lifted her by the arm on each side and carried her off along with the equipment.

Since the director had run away, we couldn't just leave the female lead behind as the scapegoat.

Ten minutes later, we're now having a meal in a fast food restaurant, which for some reason I have to pay for.

"Perhaps I've missed something. I was thinking maybe it would be better if we cast that old priest as a villain," Haruhi said this about stuff borderlining crime.

After sipping three strings of noodles, Asahina-san lay flat on the table.

"Mikuru-chan, you eat too little. How are you going to grow that way? You'll only attract a specific set of fans if all you have to offer are your breasts. You gotta straighten your back."

Haruhi said as she snatched Asahina-san's noodles and began munching on them.

I knew. I don't know in how many years, but I just know that Asahina-san's face and figure would eventually develop to Miss World standards. Although she doesn't know that herself.

Koizumi only smiled wryly, while Nagato silently brought her club sandwich to her mouth and began munching. I pushed my emptied plate aside and said to Haruhi, who had just eaten two sets of lunch,

"What are you going to do if that priest decides to complain to the school? Our cover's been blown by Koizumi's uniform."

"That shouldn't be a problem,"

Haruhi sure is optimistic,

"We were standing quite far from him, plus you see that sort of school jacket everywhere. We'll just deny any knowledge of it and pretend it has nothing to do with us. The BB bullets won't be much of an evidence against us."

I looked at the video camera that carried all the evidence and thought, wouldn't everything be out in the open once this movie gets shown? I simply do not believe that there were two waitresses out there at the same moment being surrounded by pigeons in a shrine.

"So where are we going next?"

"We need to go back to the plaza. I've been thinking, such a location alone won't be sufficient for creating an intense battle scene. In order to captivate the audience, we need something more

drastic. Well, I have a lot of ideas, like Mikuru-chan running like mad in the forest, while being chased by Yuki. And then Mikuru-chan would fall off the cliff, only to be rescued by Koizumi-kun, who happened to walk by. What do you think of such a story development?"

That was such a retarded story development. Where can you find a male high school student who just happened to walk by a forest in his uniform? Wouldn't that be too unnatural? Being the "wild card" that she is, Haruhi may really just push Asahina-san off the cliff. If that's the case, Haruhi, why don't you jump down yourself? Become Asahina-san's stunt double and don that costume as well. Hmm, though the breast size may be a bit different……

Just as I was thinking about that, Haruhi lifted her eyebrow and stared at me, "What are you thinking? Don't tell me you're having illusions of how I'd look in that waitress costume." Indeed, you've guessed correctly.

"I'm the director, after all. I can't just happily appear in front of the camera. If I had to chase two rabbits around, I'd just trip over the tree roots and break my nose."

Aren't you the Executive Producer as well?

"The crew can have as many titles as they want, but it's not too bad to play a character that only appears once in a while like precious jewelry. We need to add in factors that can make those fanatics excited."

Just what fanatics were you intending this movie for? Asahina fanatics? Up till now, the whole movie has been nothing but an Asahina Mikuru uniform special! ……But then again, that was good enough.

Koizumi very elegantly placed a cup of milk back on the table and said, "Are the three of us the only characters in this movie?"

You idiot! Stop asking unnecessary questions!

"Well……"

Haruhi now pursed her lips as she did whenever she was in deep thought. Shouldn't you consider things like these beforehand?

"Three people doesn't seem like a lot. Indeed, it's too few. We need some extras to better reflect the protagonist's energetic spirit. Thanks for reminding me of that, Koizumi-kun. As a token of my gratitude, I'm going to increase your screen time."

"Ah…… why, thank you."

The smile on Koizumi's face now read "Oh shit." Serves you right! I knew nothing good would ever come out of this, therefore I said nothing.

On the other hand, where does she expect to find new characters? There's a 75% chance that the people that she finds randomly are queer characters. According to the order, the next person would probably be a dimensional slider, but I have a feeling that such a person probably wouldn't want to come to this world in the first place.

"Before the boss is defeated, we need to have minions to beat first. Minions, minions……" Haruhi placed her finger under her lips and glanced at me.

"Those guys would do, right?"

I, too, had guessed who Haruhi was thinking of. Taniguchi and Kunikida. They were the only two who could be brought along without creating too many problems. They're the safest choice, the ultimate minions who're even more insignificant than mere extras. More harmless than a lone wandering ghost.

"I guess so."

I turned my gaze away from the director, who was thinking of whom else to bring over, and took a glance at Asahina-san lying on the table with closed eyes. She looked so cute even when sleeping, she was mesmerizing even if she was only pretending to sleep.

I then turned my sight towards Nagato, who was sipping her soda deeply with her straw. Admiring her wooden expression, I then asked,

"Then, what're we filming next?"

Haruhi gulped the bowl of noodle soup down to her stomach, it took quite a while for her to finish, "At any rate, I want Mikuru-chan to suffer as much as possible. Since the theme of this movie is about a girl who has to face all sorts of adversity, then against all odds manages to overturn them at the end and live happily ever after. The more Mikuru-chan suffers, the more catharsis she would have. Don't worry, Mikuru-chan, this is going to be a 'happy ending'." So only the final bit is "happy"? Before that, Asahina-san could only accept Haruhi's tyrannical abuse. What kind of script did Haruhi prepare anyway? Seems like I am the only one who can apply a brake to her derailing behavior, so I need to be more careful and watch over her constantly. And what the hell is this catharsis thing? Asahina-san had her tightly shut eyes opened half way, she looked at me with a pair of unique eyes, with the left eye blue in color, as though asking me to save her. But she then sighed softly and slowly closed her eyes. What's that supposed to mean? That I'm not reliable enough? Right now, when Koizumi and Nagato could not provide a barrier to the oncoming tsunami, only I am on your side.

Yet, for the past six months, no matter what I do, I just couldn't put a stop to Haruhi's insanity. I know very well that what I'm doing is very futile, yet I'd like her to at least appreciate my chivalric passion.

Frankly speaking, I don't think I've ever tried stopping Haruhi. Half a year ago, I thought that even if I had to cut off Haruhi's arms, I must have her give up the thought of creating the SOS Brigade. Yet judging from the outcome, when I was still looking confused, Haruhi had already prepared the club room and members, in the end, even I had fallen into her trap and became a member myself…… That is the outcome today.

But if I had whacked the back of that girl's head with a baseball bat, or maybe stopped her with a surprise attack, I probably wouldn't have met Asahina-san, or Nagato and Koizumi. I would probably know them through other means. In other words, maybe I would never find out that they possess ridiculous true identities as aliens or time travelers. I would just know them as normal schoolmates, as we walk past each other in the corridor.

Don't ask me which path I would have preferred myself. As I have already heard the other three members declare their identities, and I've seen Nagato's terrifying powers, Asahina-san who has grown up into another person, and Koizumi's eyes turning red. If I visited a parallel world, maybe I'll come across another version of myself who has never spoken to Haruhi or the other three members. So if you have any questions, go ask that other "me," I don't know anything myself.

Yet right now, I was in a situation where I can't say with confidence that I don't know anything. Hmm, making a movie from scratch for the school festival, there's nothing strange with that. What was strange is Haruhi's head, but that was a known fact, so there's nothing astonishing here either. Haruhi spouting idiotic stuff like suddenly wanting to make a movie was nothing new. To me, it was just another routine job, all I needed to do was just go along with what she says and hope everything works out……

That's what I thought, which was why I didn't stop her from making this movie. I don't care if you're the director or whatever, just do whatever you like! Manipulate everyone around you to your heart's content! If that makes you feel better, then I'm willing to suppress the endless sighs within my heart and go with you to the end. Because the last thing I want is to be trapped with you inside an unknown dimension.

I thought about all this while looking at the boastful Haruhi and worn-out Asahina-san, the smiling Koizumi and the mask-like expression of Nagato.

I had no idea that the moment I regretted not stopping Haruhi would arrive so quickly.

We returned to the plaza in the forest park. Couldn't we do something about this lack of planning? If we had known about this, we should've done all the filming before going to the shrine! The biggest problem was that the script only existed inside Haruhi's head. It was important after all to convey meanings into words, preserving information down in paper has got to be the greatest idea ever.

“I think we should give up on the guns. I had thought the bullets would be impressive, yet there was no flare or sound at all, that really takes the intensity away. I don’t think they’re useful at all, they’re just toy models after all.”

Haruhi seemed to just treat the Yamatsuchi Model Store as a mere sponsor. She then proceeded to mark two large crosses on the ground with the tip of her sneakers. She was probably marking the spots where Asahina-san and Nagato should be standing.

“Mikuru-chan stands here, Yuki stands over there.”

“Um.”

Being spun around in circles, Asahina-san now treaded heavily as though she had just burnt a whole day’s worth of calories. She was too mentally exhausted to resist as she walked onto the stage in her sexy waitress costume. She was now beyond shame, having regressed to the mental state of a young child, moving like a doll.

Nagato, who was already like a doll, walked quietly towards her designated spot and stood silently. Her black cloak fluttered in the mountain breeze blowing downhill.

Haruhi pointed her finger towards the toy gun she had snatched from Asahina-san and said, “Don’t leave that position, I want to film you two facing off with each other. Koizumi-kun, prepare the reflector board.” Haruhi then returned to her director’s chair, she aimed the gun in the air and pulled the trigger, “ACTION!”

She yelled with the top of her voice.

I quickly held my camera up, but Asahina-san was probably more confused than I was. Action? Haruhi only told them to stand still, she didn’t specify what other action they should make.

“……”

Nagato and Asahina-san stood silently and looked at each other’s expression.

“Um……”

Asahina-san was the first to turn her gaze away.

“……”

Nagato continued to stare at Asahina-san.

“……”

Asahina-san went silent as well.

And so, this staring scene under the mountain breeze went on endlessly.

“That’s enough!”

For some reason Haruhi became pissed,

“How can you have a battle like this?”

Because the two of them were just standing still.

Replacing the gun with a loudspeaker, Haruhi walked towards Asahina-san and knocked her on the head, which had two soft brown ponytails tied by Haruhi herself.

“Mikuru-chan, listen up. No matter how cute you are, you must never let your guard down. Cute girls can be found everywhere! If you live your life peacefully, you’ll be surpassed by other younger girls in no time!”

What are you trying to say?

Asahina-san rubbed her head innocently, Haruhi then said in a sage manner, “Which is why, Mikuru-chan, you need to fire laser beams from your eye!” “Eh?”

Asahina-san widened her eyes in astonishment.

“But that’s impossible!”

“This is the reason why that left eye has a different color! I didn’t just change your eye color to blue just because I felt like it! Hidden in that eye is an incredible power, the ability to shoot laser beams. So fire your Mikuru Beam!”

“I… I can’t!”

“Try your hardest!”

Haruhi wrapped Asahina-san’s head under her arms and smacked Asahina-san’s head with her yellow loudspeaker.

The scene of Asahina-san yelling out in pain was just too tragic. I handed the camera over to Koizumi, who had put down the reflector board and was looking bemused at this scene, and grabbed Haruhi’s collar.

“Stop it, you idiot!”

I pulled the little waitress away from the tyrannical Ultra Director.

“Normal humans can’t just fire laser beams from their eyes. Are you a moron?” Just look at Asahina-san rubbing her head with her hands! Look at how crestfallen she’s become, she’s now weeping pearl-like tears down her face already.

“Hmph,”

With her collar still being grabbed by me, she turned her head away and muttered, “Of course I know that.”

I let go of her, Haruhi knocked her own neck softly with her loudspeaker, “I just wanted her to give an awesome impression of firing out laser beams, since she doesn’t have the aura that a protagonist should have. You sure are lacking a sense of humor.” That’s because your humor isn’t even funny, and that’s a big problem. What are you going to do if Asahina-san really could fire laser beams? ……It’s not possible, is it?

I turned my eyes uncomfortably towards Asahina-san and tried to gesture to her. Asahina-san looked at me with her teary eyes. She blinked her large round eyes while tilting her neck slightly. Looks like I just can’t communicate with Asahina-san with my eyes. While I was thinking that, Koizumi came forward and shamelessly gave his advice,

“I’m sure we could take care of that by using CG effects during editing?” Koizumi smiled gently like a con man and handed a box of tissues over to Asahina-san.

“Hasn’t Suzumiya-san planned to do that since the beginning?”” “Of course I have,” Haruhi said.

Like hell you have. I thought to myself.

Asahina-san rubbed her eyes dry with the tissue and blew her nose, then looked suspiciously at both Haruhi and me.

Nagato was like a puppetmaster who stood out a lot and stood quietly in the wind. How come the sun hasn’t gone down yet? Because I can’t wait any longer for the time when filming has to stop due to insufficient light.

“We’ll redo that scene again,”

Haruhi said and began to discuss how to perform the important pose.

“Mikuru Beam! You need to shout that and make this pose.” “L… Like this?”

“No, like this! And, close your right eye.”

Haruhi’s concept was to place the left hand over the left eye in a V-shaped sign, then fire the beam upon the blink of the eye.

“Mikuru-chan, try saying it out.”

"……Mi,Mi,Mi,Mikuru Beam!"

"Louder!"

"Mikuru Beam!"

"Don't

be shy, louder!"

"Um…… Mikuru Be~~~am!"

"Amplify your voice with your abdomen!"

What the hell was that?

Asahina-san, who was blushing furiously as she shouted loudly, was now being forced by Haruhi to shout with her abdomen. The staring glances of the kids passing by on the plaza along with their parents were becoming unbearable, I really wanted to tell them that there's nothing to see here. But as we were making a movie, we were basically like a travelling circus troupe attracting attention. Actually it wasn't too bad to just shoot these well prepared scenes. I had no idea how happy Haruhi's happy story can get, but if the purpose was to promote Asahina-san, then this was too much.

A moment later, Asahina-san and Nagato returned to their battle positions; Koizumi stood aside and held the reflector boards with his hands held up as if preparing to yell Banzai, while Haruhi sat proudly on her director's chair. I stood about two meters behind Nagato's black silhouette and filmed Asahina-san over her shoulder – this was the filming angle that Haruhi demanded.

The change that followed came very suddenly.

"OK, now fire the beam!"

Haruhi shouted, Asahina-san made her pose without any confidence, "Mi…… Mikuru Beam!"

The camera recorded her unnatural dejected voice as she shouted cutely and blinked.

At that moment, the camera lens which I was looking through suddenly went pitch black.

"Huh?"

I didn't know what was going on, I even thought the camera must have broken down. I moved my eye away from the camera and saw an ominous black costume and pointed hat standing before me.

"……"

Nagato made a fist-like gesture in front of my eyes. So she was the culprit who caused the lens to go pitch black by covering it with her right hand.

"Huh?" Haruhi also opened her mouth looking astonished.

The large cross that Haruhi drew was two meters in front of me, all this time Nagato was indeed standing over there. When Haruhi shouted "Action" and Asahina-san made her cute shout, the video camera did in fact show Nagato's back. So how did Nagato manage to stand before my eyes in less than a second, as though grabbing something in her fist? I can only use spatial distortion to explain this phenomenon.

"Huh?" Haruhi also looked confused and said, "Yuki, when did you run over there?" Nagato didn't answer, and just aimed her obsidian-like eyes towards Asahina-san. Asahina-san widened her eyes and gave a terrified expression, she then slowly blinked……

Nagato's hands once again moved at the speed of light, and grabbed something in the air as though catching a flying mosquito. What happened to the star-shaped magic wand she was holding?

Huh? I thought I just heard something strange, like a match that got lighted and then swiftly thrown into the drain.

"Eh……?"

Making a confused sounding exclamation was Asahina-san, she probably had no idea what was going on. Neither did I. What was Nagato doing?

As if asking for help, Asahina-san turned her eyes towards the side…… and a strange noise came from Koizumi's direction. I can't be mistaken, it sounded like a broken car tire that was leaking gas……

The reflector board that Koizumi was holding – which was basically a piece of cheap white polystyrene board – was now sliced diagonally in half. It was rare to see the usually quiet Koizumi looking stunned at the half of the reflector that got sliced off. But I didn't have the time to enjoy such a scene.

Nagato made her move, and it was only Nagato.

The black figure leaped and softly landed in front of Asahina-san. Nagato then took her right hand from under her cloak and grabbed Asahina-san's face, the little fingers pressed against Asahina-san's forehead as though covering up her eye.

"Kyaa…… Na… Nagato-san……!"

Nagato hooked Asahina-san's leg and pushed the female-lead waitress down onto the ground. The Goddess of Death now sat on top of those voluptuous breasts like riding a horse. Asahina-san yelled wailfully, grabbing Nagato's slim arms, which were doing the attack.

"Ah!"

I finally came to my senses, but what on earth was going on? At first I thought Nagato merely obstructed my recording instantaneously, but I didn't understand what followed as Koizumi's reflector board was sliced in half, and then the time traveller got attacked by the alien. Just when did Haruhi tell them to act that way…… It doesn't seem like it, since the director was just as stunned to silence as Koizumi and I were. I don't think it has anything to do with their superb acting.

"……Cut!"

Haruhi stood up and slapped her loudspeaker against the chair.

"Hold it, Yuki, what are you doing? This wasn't in the script!" Nagato quietly sat on Asahina-san, whose smooth white legs were now exposed as she struggled to get up as Nagato grabbed her face.

I heard someone muttering behind me, I turned and found Koizumi staring at the sliced edge of the reflector board and twisted his mouth. Noticing I was looking at him, he gave me a strange glance. What's that supposed to mean?

Forget it, I don't care about Koizumi's enigmatic stare. What's important now was to stop Nagato, who had suddenly made her attack for no reason. I held my camera and ran towards the waitress and black-cloaked magician, who were huddled in one tableau.

"Hey, Nagato, what are you doing?"

The pointed hat turned slowly towards me. Nagato looked at me with her black hole-like eyes, her small lips looked as though they were about to open,

"……"

I expected her to say something, but in the end nothing was being said. Nagato looked as though she didn't know which words to use and closed her lips, and then slowly stood up. The black cloak waved slightly on the right side as she stuck her arm back inside.

"Sob……"

Lying on the ground, Asahina-san looked traumatized. Of course she would be, if Nagato suddenly ran towards me without any emotion and then pushed me down, I think I'd be scared silly as well. Because right now Nagato was like those Dark Wizards that people would last want to see when walking at night. A pre-schooler would probably piss in his pants at the sight of her.

"……"

Nagato tilted the rim of her large pointed hat towards her brow and stood still, looking at me.

I lifted Asahina-san, who was trembling all over, by the arm and helped her up. Asahina-san sobbed as tears trickled down her face, her eyes, which were covered by long eyelashes, were now soaked wet with tears, which further increased her charm…… Huh?

"That's ridiculous, just what were you two doing? Stop doing stuff that isn't written in the script." The director who didn't even write a script came over, then both she and I exclaimed at the same time, "Huh?" "Mikuru-chan, what happened to your contact lens?"

"Ah……"

Asahina-san, who was now clutching my arm tightly, placed her finger under her left eye.

"Eh?"

It was natural for the three of us to look confused, we'll just have to ask the person who knows the full details.

"Nagato, have you seen Asahina-san's contact lens?"

"I haven't."

Nagato replied without flinching. I had a feeling she's lying.

"Could it have dropped off during the brawl just now?"

Haruhi guessed incorrectly and began to look around the ground.

"Kyon, come help look for it as well. That lens isn't cheap, you know, it's the best of its kind." I knelt down on all fours and began to help Haruhi look for it. Though I knew it was a waste of time, since I had seen that Nagato was grabbing something in her right hand when backing off from Asahina-san and then had hid it away. She then pushed Asahina-san down on the ground and grabbed her face.

"I can't find anything."

Haruhi twitched her mouth. I felt sorry for her, since I wasn't seriously searching. I turned around and saw Koizumi toying around with the two sliced pieces of the reflector board, sticking them together then splitting them apart. You should at least come over and help!

Koizumi smiled and said,

"Maybe it got blown by the wind, since it's very light."

Koizumi spouted his bullshit, then showed me the broken reflector board. Haruhi stood up from the ground and snatched it away.

“What happened? It’s broken? Hmph, as expected from a cheap product. Man, the school’s Movie Club sure knows how to buy crappy stuff. Koizumi-kun, try and stick them back together with sellotape.”

Haruhi spoke in an unconcerned way, then turned her crocodile-like eyes towards an awestruck Asahina-san, whose tears had stopped by now,

“We can’t continue the scene without the colored contact lens, what should we do?” She seemed to be thinking seriously, then snapped her fingers as though a light bulb in her head had lit up, “That’s it! We’ll change it so that the eyes would change color after transformation!” “T, Transformation?” Asahina-san asked.

“That’s right. It would be too inappropriate for you to wear a waitress costume. We’ll designate this as the costume after transformation, you’ll wear something more natural the rest of the time.”

I found it utterly ridiculous for someone to look for realism in an already ridiculously fictional world, Haruhi sounded as though she has admitted herself that a waitress costume was too inappropriate. Asahina-san nodded her head quickly,

“S, sure! I’d like to wear something normal as well.”

“So during normal periods, Mikuru-chan would be wearing a bunny-girl costume.” “EH!? W,w,why?”

“Because we only have that costume. If you wore some normal costume, it wouldn’t look attractive enough. Hang on! As for the setting, I just thought about it as well. Normally, Mikuru would be a bunny-girl attracting customers in the shopping street, yet in times of danger, she would transform into the Battle Waitress! What do you think? It’s perfect, right?”

Didn’t you just say it was too inappropriate?

“OK, let’s go.”

Haruhi now revealed a sinister looking, crescent moon-shaped smile. She grabbed Asahina-san’s arms and carried Asahina-san on her back. “Eh? W…wait! Owww!!!” The waitress screamed distressfully as she got carried away into the forest.

Hmm.

……Well, that’s fine with me. I can only clasp my hands together and show my apologies to Asahina-san, because I’ve been waiting for Haruhi to leave for some time already. I’ll be looking forward to your bunny-girl costume, I won’t let your sacrifice go in vain.

……That's right, I must go and ask Nagato about the whole affair.

"Well, what was that abrupt performance all about?"

Nagato held the rim of her pointed hat down with her left hand. She hid half of her face under the shadow of the hat, then slowly stuck out her right hand. Though she was covered completely by the cloak, I could still see the white sleeve of her sailor uniform. Nagato then stuck out her right forefinger, and there was rested the blue contact lens.

So it really was you who took it away.

"This."

Nagato said slowly,

"Laser."

She then stopped talking again.

……

Hey, I've been wanting to tell you this for some time, you have not reached the minimum standards required for conveying messages clearly! At least speak for about ten seconds!

Nagato stared at her finger and said,

"A high intensity pulse transparent ray."

She said in a very slow speed. I see, it's a highly intensity pulse transparent……

I'm sorry, I'm getting even more confused now.

"A laser?" I asked.

"Yes." Nagato replied.

"Now that's amazing." Koizumi said.

Koizumi picked up the contact lens from Nagato's finger and examined it under the sunlight.

"It looks like a very normal piece of lens."

He said something "really impressive," but I didn't see how I should be awed by this, and so I was hardly "impressed."

"What's that supposed to mean!?"

Koizumi smiled and said,

“Could I please have a look at your right palm? Not yours, I meant Nagato-san’s.” The black cloaked girl looked at me, as though asking for my permission, and so I nodded back at her. After obtaining my permission, Nagato opened up her remaining four fingers, which were shut tightly a while ago. I gasped at what I saw.

“……”

A silent breeze blew past the three of us. I suddenly felt a sense of shiver, as I finally understood. So that explains everything.

On the surface of Nagato’s near wrinkle-less palm were a few black holes, which looked as though it was burnt by a red hot pincers. There were about five of them.

“I was not able to contain it.”

Don’t talk in such a relaxed manner, it looked painful enough just looking at it.

“It was very powerful and happened in an instant.”

“Did the lasers come from Asahina-san’s left eye?” Koizumi asked.

“Yes.”

What do you mean “yes?” Has Koizumi gone nuts as well? Have they figured out what was going on already? “Commencing recovery at once.”

Nagato said, then we looked as the black holes began to shrink and disappear in the speed of light and her palm returned to its usual white smoothness.

“Just what was going on?”

I could only look astonished,

“Did Asahina-san really shoot beams from her eye?”

“Those were not particle accelerators, but intensified rays.” What difference does it make? I don’t care whether it’s lasers, masers or atomic heat rays used to destroy Mothra’s cocoon, it’s all the same to a layman like me. What’s the difference between an ion cannon and an antiproton cannon anyway when both can be used to defeat the monster? The problem was, why did Asahina-san fire atomic heat rays even when there’re no monsters around? “It’s intensified rays, not atomic heat rays.”

Didn’t I just say it makes no difference? I don’t need such scientific verification.

Nagato quietly retracted her right hand, I rubbed the back of my head, while Koizumi flicked the piece of contact lens lightly with his finger.

"Did Asahina-san originally come with this ability?"

"No," Nagato swiftly rejected that hypothesis, "Presently Asahina Mikuru is a normal human being, her body no different from other people."

"Does this colored contact-lens have any special features in it?" Koizumi continued to ask.

"No, it is just a decoration."

It has to be, since Haruhi was the one who brought the piece of contact lens. Yet that was exactly where the problem was, it was because she was the one who had bought it that made it even more significant.

This was something which had to be throughly investigated. If Nagato hadn't dodged in front of me, then the laser from Asahina-san's eye would have gone through the camera lens and straight into my eye, then exited from the back of my head after burning everything inside, especially my brain, which would probably stink like hell after being burned badly. That wouldn't be a good sight.

Speaking of which, I feel pretty embarrassed at having Nagato come and save my life again.

"In that case,"

Koizumi rubbed his chin and smiled wryly,

"This was the work of Suzumiya-san, right? Since she had wanted a Mikuru Beam, so reality had been altered in accordance with her wishes."

"That is correct."

Nagato's expression remained blank when making such a firm response. I could never be as calm as her.

"Hang on! There's no magic inside this piece of contact lens, right? So why did a killer laser appear just because Haruhi wished for it?"

"Suzumiya-san does not require magic or any sort of science. As long as she believed something 'exists,' then it would truly 'exist.'"

I don't think I could accept such an inverted way of thinking.

"Haruhi doesn't really wish for Asahina-san to fire beams from her eye. That was just for the movie, didn't she say so herself? It was just a joke."

“Indeed.”

Koizumi nodded his head. Don’t just accept my challenge so easily, how am I supposed to continue like that? “We all know that Suzumiya-san does possess some form of common sense, but it is also a known fact that the common sense of this world doesn’t apply to her. Perhaps it was probably due to some extraordinary event this time…… Ah, they’ve returned. Let us discuss this later.” Koizumi casually placed the piece of contact lens into his shirt pocket.

This is such a bother.

Using human intelligence to do battle with a mysterious force that threatens to destroy the Earth; beating down the bad guys; having a supernatural battle as though it were a daily routine; interspersed with some drama within……

To be honest, I much prefer being in that sort of story. If I didn’t have to face such circumstances now, I’d rather be involved in a totally fictional setting, the more ridiculous the better.

But look at me now. All because I spoke to a certain classmate, I ended up triggering the source for all these disasters, meeting all sorts of weird people, and doing all sorts of strange stuff. Firing beams from the eye? Just what the hell was that? Does it have any meaning to it?

Thinking back at the strange trio, neither Asahina-san, Nagato, or Koizumi could really prove their identities. The three of them all casually introduced themselves, yet I was crazy enough to actually believe them. While I may have experienced events that I have no choice but to believe had happened, there was a limit to everything, and I have my own sets of standards as well. Though these standards have become more and more strange lately.

According to their statements: Asahina-san is a time traveler from the future. She never said which year she’s from, I only know the reason she came here – to observe Suzumiya Haruhi.

Nagato was an artificially created Living Humanoid Interface by some alien entity. “What the hell is that?” You ask, you wouldn’t understand even if I told you. I’m sure half of us wouldn’t be able to understand, myself included. What were these people like her doing on this planet then? Nagato said it’s because her boss, something called the Integrated Data Sentient Entity, was very interested in Suzumiya Haruhi.

As for Koizumi, he’s an esper sent by a group calling themselves the ‘Organization’. One of his missions involved him being transferred to this school and observing Suzumiya Haruhi.

Although Haruhi, who plays a central role in all of this, has known this trio with extraordinary backgrounds for some time already, she has no idea of their true identities. Asahina-san described her as a “temporal distortion.” Nagato said she was a “self-evolution possibility.” Koizumi was even more ridiculous, simply calling her “God.”

Thanks for the hard work, guys.

I know this is asking a lot, but please do something about Haruhi! Otherwise this female brigade commander is going to remain an enigma and have us forever trapped within her enormous gravitational field like a neutron star. It was still fine now, but think about what would happen in ten years time! What would happen if Haruhi still behaved as she did today? It would be very troublesome. Illegally occupying the club room, walking in strides with a scowl on her face, starting a ruckus for no reason, and being moody all the time. People would still tolerate her during her teens, but they wouldn't be so easy on her once she gets older. She won't be able to fit into society by then. Do Asahina-san, Nagato, and Koizumi intend to still be with her, still doing the same stuff then?

If so, allow me to leave first. I'm sorry, I have no intention of staying like this, since time doesn't wait. You can't just reset a life easily, and there are no save points lying around in some back alley allowing you to save your progress.

This has nothing to do with Haruhi distorting time, creating a data explosion, or destroying and creating worlds. She and I are two different people. There's just no way I can play cat and mouse with a kid forever. Even if I wanted to, in the end I still have to go my own way. It may be in a few years, or a few decades away, but the time will eventually come, no matter what.

"How long are you going to moan for? You're used to this already!" I turned and saw Haruhi dragging Asahina-san out from the forest.

"Show some dignity as a professional actress! Changing without hesitation is the fastest way to the Blue Ribbon Rookie Award! And it's not like I'm asking you to strip naked. After all, one needs to keep their precious dignity intact."

Haruhi now sounded like a foxhound who had just caught a rabbit. Haruhi dragged the bunny-girl Asahina-san out, whose high-heeled shoes doesn't seem suitable for walking on the dirt, and revealed a smile so bright it could make a person sneeze.

"If this movie's a success, I'll take everyone to a hot springs trip using the box office receipts. Think of it as a reward for all the hard work! You want to go too, don't you, Mikuru-chan?"

But…… Forget it. Before this ends, I might as well ride on her train of madness for now. The reason I hang out with you is because I too am involved in this movie plot that you have set up. If I take Koizumi's perspective, then I have nothing to lose. Sadly, I don't possess any unknown powers.

So, allow me to happily be your backroom staff for now.

Maybe in a few years time I would look back and laugh at this, saying, "Wow, did that really happen?"

I think.

Dressed in her bunny-girl costume, Asahina-san now looked even more embarrassed than when she was wearing the waitress costume. Haruhi, on the other hand, was beaming brightly. What are you so giddy about?

I pretended to adjust the focus of the camera and zoomed in onto Asahina-san's breasts. I needed to confirm that thing first.

There on the left of Asahina-san's white bosom was a small birthmark, looking carefully, it was in the shape of a star. Confirmation complete, this is indeed my Asahina-san, and not an impostor.

"What are you doing?"

Haruhi's face suddenly appeared in front of the lens.

"Don't shoot scenes that I don't want. This isn't your private video camera, you know." Of course I know that! I didn't even press the record button yet, I was merely looking.

"All right, everybody! Listen up! Next, we'll be filming the daily life of Mikuru. Mikuru-chan, you'll need to walk naturally around over there while the camera follows you behind."

What kind of daily life involves walking around in a bunny-girl costume in this kind of park? "It doesn't matter. In this movie this is absolutely normal. It doesn't make sense to ask for realism in a fictional world!" That's supposed to be my line! It's because you've brought in fictional elements into this reality that things are getting messed up now! Afterwards, unaware that she could now fire killer beams, Asahina-san underwent acting lessons under Haruhi's supervision, as she went around picking up flowers, blowing brown leaves off the palm of her hand, and running around on the grass. Slowly but surely she was falling apart with fatigue.

Then Haruhi delivered the knock-out blow,

"Hmm, it doesn't seem right to have a bunny-girl running around in the mountains. This background just doesn't fit at all. Let's go back to the streets!"

Without flinching, Haruhi completely overthrew what she just said. As a result, we had to ride the bus again to return to the city.

No longer having to do any lighting work for now, Koizumi carried under his arm the reflector board, sloppily repaired with sellotape, as well as half of the equipment that I stuffed to him, while his other arm held the handrail.

I stood next to him, while standing like a shadow besides us was Nagato. Only Haruhi and Asahina-san sat on the empty seats. Haruhi snatched the camera from my hands and sat on the double seats, filming Asahina-san from her side.

Asahina-san lowered her head and softly answered Haruhi's questions. I'm guessing the lead actress was being interviewed by the director right now.

The bus meandered down the winding hill road and towards the residential area. I secretly prayed that the driver would concentrate on driving safely instead of glancing at the rear-view mirror all the time.

Perhaps my prayers were heard, since the bus finally arrived safely at the terminal. All this time, the other passengers have been sitting at a distance, nearly all of them staring at Haruhi, Asahina-san, and Nagato. The wobbling bunny ears and the smooth white exposed shoulders were just too deadly. By now, rumors of Asahina the Bunny-Girl have probably spread to the whole town, not just in North High.

Maybe that's exactly what Haruhi had in mind. "I heard there was a pretty bunny-girl riding a bus yesterday." "Oh, I've seen them." "What are you talking about?" "I hear there's a club in North High called the SOS Brigade." "The SOS Brigade?" "That's right, the SOS Brigade." "SOS Brigade, huh? I'll remember that." Was she aiming for such a development? Asahina-san isn't the SOS Brigade's cover girl! In a way, she's supposed to be the tea maid and my anti-depressant. I'm sure she thinks the same as I do, definitely.

Of course, with Haruhi, she wouldn't be able to hear the thoughts of other people. Because she is built with an amazing device that ejects any unfavorable opinion out the moment it enters her ears. If I could find out the secret to how this device works, I'm pretty sure the Selection Committee for the Nobel Prize in Physiology would nominate me in their shortlist. Anyone here want to give it a try? (The secret is to just make up some bullshit.)

Until the sun had set, Asahina-san spent the rest of the day as a bunny-girl. What did she do in that outfit, you ask? Well, not much, apart from running around in this costume. This was no different from those Hunt for Mysterious Events activities, but this time she was even more worn out as she has to put up with the stares from other people, worrying if someone might call the police. Haruhi has no concept of what a filming permit is. It was Haruhi's freedom to shoot wherever she liked. Her freedom was as unrestrained as that of the Pope Innocent III in the third century - I think. In fact, she's completely misinterpreted the true meaning of freedom.

"That's it for today."

Finally, Haruhi had the expression of having a hard day's work done. Besides Nagato, the rest of us all breathed a sigh of relief. What a long day. I'm going to take a break Sunday.

"Then see you tomorrow. We meet at the same time and place as today." She sure doesn't know when to stop. I didn't know you had the power to ask the school to compensate for our holidays.

"What are you talking about? We're already lagging behind in our filming schedule! Now is not the time to rest idly! You can relax all you like once the school festival is over! Before that, just pretend the red numbers don't exist on the calendar!"

We're only on the second day of filming. Can't you do something about the poor time planning? What do you mean by lagging behind? Does that mean all the hours worth of filming today won't be used at all? Was Haruhi trying to make a series franchise? This is just a movie made specifically for a school festival, not a big budget production.

Yet Haruhi doesn't look worried at all. She stuffed all the equipment on me, and wearing her armband, she gave an impeccable smile,

"Then we'll meet tomorrow! I'll make sure this movie is a success. No, since I'm the director, success is already guaranteed. The rest is up to you. Make sure you're punctual! Absentees will be personally executed by me!"

After making this announcement, she left humming the tune of "Rock is Dead" by Marilyn Manson.

"I'll inform Asahina-san about it."

Koizumi whispered softly to my ear before leaving, Asahina-san was covered in Koizumi's school jacket. If it were winter, I would have brought my own jacket. Sadly, the weather now was still stuck in the end of summer. I looked at the equipment piled up by my feet with a feeling of frustration.

"Inform her of what?"

"About the laser. As long as there's no change in eye color, then no strange beams would be fired. I think that's how Suzumiya-san's rule works. So there won't be a problem if she doesn't wear any colored contact lens."

The lighting assistant, whose job was just to hold up the reflector board, now gave me a professional smile like one of those insurance agents.

"Just to be safe, I think we should take some precautionary measures. I'm sure she will cooperate. After all, those beams are dangerous stuff."

Koizumi then walked towards the black cloaked Nagato, standing like an anthropomorphized piece of glass.

As I returned home carrying various sized bags of equipment, my sister looked astonished at me as though she had seen a strange creature. This elementary schoolgirl, the culprit responsible for spreading that stupid “Kyon” nickname around, now jumped around yelling, “Is that a camera? Wow! Can I play with it, too?” I yelled, “Get lost, idiot!” And promptly returned to my room.

I was so exhausted already. The thoughts of becoming a voyeur cameraman had long evaporated from my head. Of course, it would be a different story if it involved Asahina-san, but I’m not that sick as to want to preserve video images of my own sister! I mean, where’s the fun in that?

After putting down all the bags on the floor, I laid down on my bed at once. I had a brief moment of peace, before my sister, under my mom’s orders to call me down for dinner, attacked me with her deadly elbow strike.

Chapter 4

The following day, we once again reluctantly waited in front of the station. This time, however, instead of the three SOS Brigade members, I found myself standing alongside some new faces. The so-called “minion characters” that Haruhi had called for.

“Hey, Kyon, this is different from what you told us,”

Taniguchi protested and said,

“Where’s the beautiful Asahina-san? We only came because you said she would come pick us up! But I don’t see her anywhere.”

Sure enough, it’s already past the appointed time and Asahina-san has yet to arrive. She’s probably hiding in her house wanting to skip class today, after going through so much during the past two days.

“I only came so that I could satiate my visual appetite, but what is this? So far all I’ve seen is Suzumiya looking pissed. This is a rip off!”

Stop complaining! Why don’t you observe Nagato as well then? “Now that you mention it, Nagato-san’s costume sure suits her.” This was Kunikida speaking casually, as he was chosen as minion number two after Taniguchi. Haruhi had called me on the phone last night while I was taking a shower. Taking the phone receiver my sister handed to me, I washed my hair as I heard her saying over the phone, “That idiot Taniguchi and that other guy…. I can’t remember his name… Anyways, they’re your friends. Bring those two over tomorrow. I want to use them as minions.” After saying that, she promptly hung up. You should at least say “Hi!” When making requests you should ask people in a polite way, not order people around! Just like how Asahina-san makes her requests.

I didn’t know what plans Taniguchi and Kunikida had for their vacation, so I called their cell phones after my shower. The two extras with a lot of free time agreed to come right away. Just what do they do on their holidays anyway?

Maybe she thought two guys weren’t enough, because Haruhi brought another extra. This extra bent forward as though she was bowing and examined Nagato, whose eyes were covered by her wide-rimmed hat. She hung her very long hair and smiled at me,

“Kyon-kun, how’s Mikuru?”

Tsuruya is this energetic girl’s name, who happens to be Asahina-san’s classmate. According to Asahina-san, she’s… “A friend I’ve met in this age”, so I guess there shouldn’t be anything queer about her. Back in June, when Haruhi wanted to enter the baseball tournament, Asahina-san brought this second year schoolgirl to help make up the numbers. Oh yeah, Taniguchi and Kunikida were there as well, and even my sister came.

Tsuruya-san generously revealed her shining white teeth and said, “So what are we doing today? She told me to come over if I had time, so I came. What’s that armband on Suzumiya-san’s arm about? What’s that handheld camera for? And what’s with Yuki’s costume?” She bombarded me with question after question. Just as I was about to answer her, Tsuruya-san had already walked off towards Koizumi, “Wow, Itsuki-kun! You look awesome as usual today!”

She sure is a busy person.

Haruhi was just as energetic, as she shouted in a deafening tone towards her cell phone early in the morning, “What!? You’re the protagonist! 30% of the success of this movie depends on you! Of course, I’m responsible for the remaining 70%, but that doesn’t matter! What’d you say? A stomachache? Stop kidding me! Only an elementary school kid would use such an excuse! I give you thirty seconds to come here at once!” It seems Asahina-san has begun to lock herself in, like a hikkikomori. When she realized she had to go through the same thing again today, it’s only natural for her to suffer a mentally induced stomachache. She is a faint-hearted person, after all.

“Really!”

Haruhi furiously hung up her phone, then revealed a menacing glare that looked like that of a butler about to scold a child who doesn’t know her table manners,

“She deserves some punishment!”

You shouldn’t be saying that. Asahina-san isn’t like you. She only wants to live her life peacefully, or at least take a break on Sunday when there’s no school. Even I too thought so.

Of course, Haruhi wasn’t going to allow the female lead to go AWOL. The director who demanded so much from the lead actress without even paying her anything said,

“I’ll go fetch her. Lend me that bag for now.”

Haruhi snatched the bag containing the clothes and rushed straight towards the taxi stand. She then knocked on the window of the taxi parked in front, had the driver open the door, and after she quickly dove into the car, the taxi drove off immediately.

Now that I think about it, I don’t even know where Asahina-san lives, though I’ve been to Nagato’s place many times…

“I can understand how Asahina-san feels.” Without my even noticing, Koizumi was standing by my side and talking to me.

Tsuruya-san now greeted the two bozos from my class non-stop and said, “Yo, long time no see!” Koizumi smiled at the sight, then said,

“I have a feeling she really will become a transforming magical girl if things continue going the way they are now. After all, she’s even fired laser beams. It’s getting ridiculous already.”

“What can be more ridiculous than this?” “You’re right. If she were told to spit fire from her mouth, it wouldn’t be too hard to train…” Asahina-san isn’t a monster. Neither is she a circus performer, or even some evil wrestler. What’ll happen if she burns those cute lips of hers? Who’s going to be responsible for that? Don’t tell me you’re going to take responsibility.

“No, if there were something that I have to be responsible for, it would be standing by idly until the ‘Avatars’ begin to wreak havoc. Fortunately, things still haven’t deteriorated to such a level… That has only happened once, I believe. I’m really grateful of you back then. Thanks to you, the disaster was averted and contained.”

About half a year ago, the world was nearly destroyed thanks to Haruhi. It was thanks to my hard work and mental exhaustion that mankind was able to survive. I felt it wouldn’t be too much if all the heads of state around the world were to give me a thank you letter. So far I have yet to be visited by any foreign diplomatic envoy. Sigh, on the other hand, even if they had come they would have only increased my woes, so I didn’t expect them to come. The only reward I received was being embraced by a teary-eyed Asahina-san, yet when I think about it, that’s more than enough for me. So I didn’t feel any gladness at being thanked by Koizumi.

“As for that Mikuru Be…”

Stop calling her by her first name; it pisses me off.

“I’m sorry. Right now we should be able to prevent Asahina-san from firing anymore strange beams.” How did you do it? Should you be this optimistic just because Haruhi didn’t bring any colored contact lens this time? “No, we’ve eliminated that factor already. I asked Nagato-san to help out a bit.” I turned my gaze towards the girl who was standing still and staring at the shops in front of the station, and then looked back at Koizumi again, “What did you do to Asahina-san?”

“Don’t be so nervous, we merely removed her ability to fire lasers. I’m not too sure how, as unlike the other TFEI interfaces, Nagato-san wouldn’t say anything. I only asked her to reduce the threat posed by Asahina-san to zero.”

“What on earth is a TFEI?”

“It’s just an abbreviation we use amongst ourselves, you don’t have to know what it stands for. I feel that Nagato-san is the most outstanding one among all of ‘them’. I’ve been wondering, what else is she responsible for besides being a simple communication interface?”

What he meant was – What else does this silent girl that loves reading do besides observing Haruhi? Some people still find it a pity that Asakura Ryouko had disappeared, though personally I don’t feel sad at all.

About thirty minutes later, the taxi carrying Haruhi had returned, also inside was Asahina-san wearing her waitress costume. Like yesterday, she still looked very gloomy. Haruhi asked the driver for a receipt, she probably wanted reimbursements for her expenses.

Taniguchi and Kunikida looked at them and muttered,

“One night when coming home from the convenience store, I came across a taxi,” “And?”

“And instead of a ‘For Hire’ lamp on top, I saw that the taxi lamp read ‘Love Car’.” “You must’ve been surprised?”

“Before I could confirm, the taxi had driven off. It was then that I realized, isn’t love what I’m lacking right now?”

“Did that taxi really have a ‘Love Car’ lamp on it? That must’ve been some custom made taxi.” I can’t help but be amazed by the conversation made by these two idiots, and I had a feeling that the shortage of talent was becoming very serious. If Taniguchi and Kunikida were nickel alloys, then Tsuruya-san would be platinum. Their difference would be between that of a firework and the Apollo 11 spacecraft.

“Ah, Mikuru has come by taxi! Eh? Who are you?”

Tsuruya-san’s pitch was very high. Her slightly medium-high pitch voice was probably just a pitch lower than Haruhi’s abnormally high natural pitch. Though Tsuruya-san should be within the bounds of the normal world.

“Wow! You’re so sexy! Where does Mikuru work at? Don’t you have to be at least eighteen? Huh? Aren’t you just seventeen? Oh, don’t worry, since we’re not customers anyway.”

Asahina-san’s teary eyes now reveal their natural colors. It seems there’s a shortage of colored contact lens.

Haruhi now dragged the tiny waitress out of the car.

“What do you mean sick? I won’t let you use such an excuse! We’re going to continue filming! Next would be the exciting scenes of Mikuru-chan! This is all for the SOS Brigade! No matter what age they are, the audience will always be moved by acts of self-sacrifice!”

Then go sacrifice yourself!

“In this world, there’s only one female protagonist. To be honest, I’d like to be that person, but this time I’ve generously allowed you to play that role, at least until the school festival ends!”

In this world, no one would acknowledge you as a female protagonist! Tsuruya-san clapped her hands against Asahina-san's shoulders, causing her to cough frantically.

"What's this costume? A racing girl? What role are you playing? That's it! You can wear that at the fried noodle shop during the school festival! I'm sure that it'll attract lots of customers!"

I really do understand Asahina-san's wanting to become a hermit. When faced with continuously fierce attacks, no one is going to stand on the pitcher's mound and be the pitcher.

Asahina-san slowly lifted her head, then with the look of someone about to die for her religion, she looked at me as though begging for help, and then looked away. She slowly breathed a soft sigh, but she still managed to give a weak smile and walk in strides towards me.

"Sorry I'm late."

I looked at the top of Asahina-san's head, which was lowered down, and said, "It's alright, I don't really mind."

"I'll treat you to lunch…"

"There's no need to, don't worry about it."

"I'm so sorry about yesterday, it seems like I unexpectedly fired an optical weapon…" "It's fine, I'm not hurt anyway…"

I took a peek at my surroundings. Nagato stood while staring blankly and holding her staff with a star attached to its end. Asahina-san looked at me, lowered her already soft voice and said,

"I was bitten."

She rubbed her left wrist.

"Bitten by what?"

"By Nagato-san. I heard it was for the injection of some nanomachines… But, my eyes don't seem to be able to fire anything anymore, so I'm relieved."

Thanks to this, I don't have to worry about being sliced into pieces… Right? Speaking of which, I find the sight of Nagato biting Asahina-san rather hard to visualize. What did she inject?

"It was yesterday night, when she came with Koizumi-kun to my place…" Koizumi, who was in charge of looking after the equipment, was now talking to Haruhi. I would have wanted to go last night! He should have asked me to come along! Paying Asahina-san a visit was definitely more fun than being tricked into a Sealed Dimension.

"What are you two chatting about?"

Tsuruya-san wrapped her small soft arm around Asahina-san's neck, "Mikuru, you're so cute! How I want to keep you as a pet! Kyon-kun, do you two get along well?" Now really…

The two bozos Taniguchi and Kunikida were now looking at Asahina-san with their mouths wide open. Hey, stop looking! What are you going to do if she loses a piece of her costume? As I was thinking this, Haruhi yelled,

"The place has been decided!"

What place?

"For outdoor shooting!"

Is that so? I keep forgetting that we're making a movie. I don't know why, I just wanted to forget about it. Also, for some reason, I can't help but feel that this is the filming location for some low-cost pop-idol DVD.

"There's a huge pond near Koizumi-kun's place, so let's begin our filming there today!" In almost the blink of an eye, Haruhi quickly picked up a plastic flag that read "filming cast and crew" and led the way forward.

I called over Taniguchi and Kunikida; who were still staring at Asahina-san with their dirty, staring eyes, and generously shared the bags and equipment that I carried with them.

We walked for about thirty minutes before coming to the side of a pond. The location was somewhere in the middle of the hill, which was basically right at the center of the residential district. While it might be called a pond, it's a pretty massive body of water. So big that migratory birds would probably come flocking over during winter. According to Koizumi, the ducks and swallows should be flying in anytime soon.

The pond was surrounded by a metal fence, which pretty much tells people not to trespass. That's common knowledge, isn't it? Maybe it has to do with how a person is brought up. Lately, even elementary school kids won't play around here, except for those who are mentally insane.

"What're you waiting for? Hurry up and climb over!"

I'd forgotten that Haruhi *is*, in fact, a seriously insane person; as she placed her foot over the fence and waved her hand. Asahina-san placed her hands on her extremely short skirt and seemed to become very despairing. Tsuruya-san stood beside and giggled,

"Huh? What did we come here for? Hey! Is Mikuru going to swim?" Asahina-san shook her head very quickly, sighed, and stared at the green pond surface as though she'd just seen blood.

“Don’t you think this fence is a bit too tall for us to climb over?” Koizumi wasn’t talking to me, but to Nagato. You’re wasting your time trying to start a proper conversation with her. She’ll either give you a simple “yes” or “no” answer, or she’ll begin a string of incomprehensible jargon.

“…”

Though Nagato remained silent, she had a peculiar reaction. She placed her finger on the top of the fence and slowly pulled it outwards. For some reason, the metallic fence, which was supposed to be firmly stuck to the ground, now bent softly like toffee placed under the sun, and then it slowly coagulated in its bent form.

She was as elegant as usual. I frantically turned and looked at the others’ reactions, perhaps I was worrying too much.

“Huh? This fence looks quite old.”

Kunikida said as though he knew everything.

“Just what am I playing? She can’t have me play a kappa…” Taniguchi mumbled as he walked through the opening caused by the bent fence and on towards the pond.

Tsuruya-san followed behind him, holding hands with Asahina-san, who was reluctantly led towards the pond where Haruhi was waiting.

I’m so relieved that the extra trio didn’t have that much intelligence.

Koizumi smiled at me and Nagato, then slid his body through the fence opening, while Nagato, the black mage, also walked past me like a phantom.

Oh well, let’s hurry up and get this over with! Before anyone discovers that public property has been vandalized, that is.

Asahina-san and Nagato stood facing each other again, looks like it’s yet another battle scene. I really wonder whether Haruhi had even seriously written the script. When is Koizumi going to come on? Still wearing his school uniform today, Koizumi stood behind me and continued his role as the reflector board holder.

Haruhi placed the director’s chair on the dirt and scribbled what might be the dialogue in her sketchbook.

“This scene will show Mikuru being forced into a desperate situation, with her blue eye beams having been nullified.”

Haruhi stopped writing with her pen and smiled, looking satisfied.

“Yes, this’ll do. You there, hold this and stand over there.” And so, Taniguchi was put in charge of holding up the dialogue placards. The two actresses began reading the placards held up by an obviously disgruntled Taniguchi: “I won’t be deterred by this set back! Y-you evil alien Yuki! H-h-hurry up and leave Earth at once…! Umm… Sorry…” Asahina-san couldn’t help but apologize for no reason after reading her lines, Nagato Yuki the evil alien magician then said, “…Is that so?”

She nonchalantly nodded her head and read her lines following Haruhi’s instructions, “You should be the one to disappear from this time period. He is ours. That is how much he is worth to us. Though he has not discovered his powers yet, those are very precious powers. We will need those powers in order to invade Earth.” Moving in tandem with Haruhi waving her loudspeaker, Nagato waved her star-shaped wand and pointed it towards Asahina-san’s face.

“I-I-I won’t let you have your way! Even if it means risking my life.” “If that is so, then prepare to die.”

“Cut!” Haruhi yelled and stood up, she then ran between the two of them and said, “You girls need to create an atmosphere! Yes, the sort of atmosphere like now, but don’t stray from the script. And Mikuru-chan, come over here.” The director and female lead abandoned us and turned away. I put down my camera and scratched my neck. Just what were they discussing? Tsuruya-san could take it no more and began to laugh out loud, “What kind of movie is this? Can this even be called a movie? Nyahahaha! This is too funny!” Besides you, I guess only Haruhi would find this funny.

Taniguchi and Kunikida stood aimlessly with a “What the hell were we called here for?” expression. Nagato stood by the side, as though she had nothing to do with it. While Koizumi stood naturally and looked at the edge of the pond. I took out the tape, which was nearly full, and replaced it with a new tape. I had the feeling that I was creating useless trash.

Tsuruya-san looked at the equipment I was carrying with interest, “Hmm, is this what they use to make videos these days? It’s full of Mikuru’s funny images, right? Can I please have a look at them later? I think it’ll be pretty funny.” It’s nothing funny, really. Handing out flyers dressed as a bunny girl took only a day, though this ridiculously hilarious movie would last until the day before the school festival. We could go from skipping classes to skipping school altogether. This would be very bothersome for me, since I wouldn’t be able to drink any fine tea. Nagato’s tea would be tasteless, while Haruhi’s tea would be bitter due to the laws of physics. Leaving Koizumi’s tea aside, if I have to end up brewing tea for myself, then I’d rather drink tap water.

“Sorry to keep you guys waiting!”

Indeed, we have waited for quite some time. About time you returned, because I don’t want to ruin the nice natural scenery by the pond anymore.

“The real climax is about to start, look carefully guys!”

Haruhi pushed Asahina-san forward. Even if you didn't ask, I would look at her every day with my eyes wide open anyway! See? As usual, Asahina-san looks just as cute, pretty and…

"Huh?"

The color of one of her eyes has changed, this time it's the right eye. The silver-colored eye looked at me apologetically and moved between me and the ground below.

"Now, Mikuru-chan, fire your amazing Mikuru Beam R and shoot out some incredible stuff or whatever, just attack!"

There was no way I could stop this in time, and even if I could, I would have already been sliced into pieces. By the way, this happened all too suddenly, Haruhi giving her terrible command, Asahina-san blinking her eyes looking horrified, and…

Nagato pushed Asahina-san down by the side of pond; the appearance of her black silhouette was just too sudden.

Yesterday's scene was repeated again today, it was like watching a tape recording all over. Nagato showed off her amazing instantaneous movement skills.

In an instant, only her hat remained where she had once stood, and then slowly fluttered down towards the ground. The body which was wearing the hat had moved off yards away in just the blink of an eye (about 0.2 seconds), and climbed on top of Asahina-san, grabbing her on the forehead…

"Na-Na-Nagato-sa… KYAA!!!"

With a blank expression, Nagato ignored the pitiful screams of Asahina-san, her short hair waved back and forth as she sat on top of Asahina-san.

"Wait a minute!" Haruhi quickly came to her senses.

"Yuki! You're a magician! You aren't supposed to be good at close-quarter combat according to my script! Mud-wrestling in this place…"

Haruhi said that, and then shut her mouth. She thought for about three seconds then said, "Ah, well, I guess this could do as well. It could be another selling point, right? Kyon! Record all of this! This is Yuki's rare moment of glory!" I don't think it's any moment of glory at all. She's just reacting out of instinct to counter the threat caused by the contact lens. Asahina-san probably understood as well, but she couldn't help but scream and shake her legs nonstop as a result of shock. I'm such a sick person. Now's not the time for me to stare at such scenery.

At this moment, a thudding noise was heard. Besides the two actresses, the others all turned and looked behind.

The sound came from the pond fence opening where Haruhi leapt over and where we walked through. The opening created by Nagato now revealed a large hole, the fence was cut into a V-shape and fell outwards towards the road, as though it had been hit by an invisible laser.

I turned my eyes back to the scene of crime, and saw Nagato biting Asahina-san's wrist like an anemic vampire.

"I was careless,"

Nagato surprisingly said, as though she had made a mistake, "I had originally allowed the laser to disperse without causing harm to humans, but this time the beam was composed of hyper-vibration particles…" She said all of this in one single breath. Koizumi handed her the hat he picked up on the ground and said, "Something like optic fiber? But this sort of particle blade is invisible and weightless, right?" Nagato received the hat and promptly placed it on her head and said, "I sensed a tiny amount of mass, about ten to the power of negative forty-one grams." "Even smaller than neutrons?"

Nagato said nothing and only looked at Asahina-san's eye, the waitress's right eye was still silver in color.

"Umm…"

Asahina-san rubbed her bitten wrist and asked in a frightened voice, "What did you just inject into my body…?"

The tip of the pointed hat tilted five centimeters forward. For me, that's a sign of Nagato looking troubled. Maybe she was thinking of how to convey this properly. As expected, Nagato then said,

"By alternating the dimensional vibration periods, a gravitational field can then be created on the surface of the object."

Looks like she's trying very hard to explain this difficult to understand fact. While I can understand that she has probably nullified the invisible killer beams, what I can't understand is how the other two seem to be able to get what she had just said. Koizumi said, "I see, so the tremors are caused by gravity?" He was asking questions that didn't seem to be relevant at all. Nagato probably thought so as well, since she remained silent.

Koizumi shrugged his shoulders as though it was his trademark gesture, "But we really were careless, I guess I should take partial responsibility as well. I always thought that eyes could only fire laser beams. Could it really fire anything as Suzumiya-san has described, as long as it's out of this world? It sure is impossible to catch up with Suzumiya-san's way of thinking, I'm amazed." There's no way we could catch up, she has run far ahead of the whole human race by three whole rounds. I could even feel her coming back behind me now, though when I look

carefully, it's as though she's running in the same circle, giving one the illusion that she hasn't run forward at all, which is exactly what she is good at. And that's not all, only those of us who were forced to run on this circular track with her could understand this feeling.

The reason why Haruhi runs so fast is that she doesn't care whether the track is an S-shaped track or a crisscrossed three-dimensional track, she just would have charged forward without thinking. Not to mention, she's fitted with a compressed engine, meaning that she could go on forever. She can quickly make up rules that are just impossible to follow, no matter how much one wants to, and she, herself, doesn't realize that this isn't a real race. She is just simply beyond control.

"It's not too bad," Koizumi said, "We'll let the local authorities take the blame for neglecting to maintain the quality of the fence, I'm sure people will buy this story. What's important is that no one was hurt."

I took a peek at the pale face hiding under the wide-rimmed hat. Just a moment ago I saw a huge gash on Nagato's palm as though she had just grabbed a sickle with her bare hands. How I'd like to show this to the troublemaker, though that gash has now been healed as though it had never existed.

I looked at the second group standing not far from us. Haruhi and the three extras were now looking at the video on the camera, and then they screamed… sorry, it was only Tsuruya-san that screamed.

"What should we do? I have a feeling something terrible will happen if we keep on filming."
"But we can't just stop here. If we refuse to comply, what do you think Suzumiya-san would do?"
"She'd go ballistic."

"I think so as well. Even if she didn't go ballistic herself, I'm sure the 'Avatars' would in the Sealed Dimension." Stop reminding me of that horrible place again. I don't want to go there again, and I don't want to do *that* ever again.

"Perhaps Suzumiya-san is happy with how things are now. She's making her own movie using her own imagination, and her every move is like that of a god. You should know as well, she's very frustrated at how reality doesn't conform to her way of thinking. Though she doesn't show it on the outside, since she isn't aware of it herself, the end result is the same. However, in the movie world, the story moves according to her wishes, so anything is possible. Suzumiya-san is trying to create another world using movies as a medium."

As expected from a self-centered person, unless she has a certain amount of money and power, it's near impossible to have everything go her way. She might as well become a politician.

As I switched through various frowning faces, Koizumi kept smiling and continued, "Of course, Suzumiya-san is not aware of all of this. Since the beginning she has been creating this fictional world, which shows how much passion she has with this movie. I think she may be a bit too passionate, and she has unwittingly affected the real world as a result." As with dice having only

negative points, no matter how much you throw, you'll still lose in the end. The longer this movie goes on, the more Haruhi will go out of control, but it's a worse idea to have her give up on this project, so I'll pick the lesser of two evils.

"If I have no choice but to throw the dice, then I would choose to go on throwing." And why is that?

"Because I'm tired of destroying 'Avatars' already… Just kidding… Sorry about that. Anyway, compared to allowing the world to be rebuilt all over, our chances of survival would be higher if we allow some minor changes to occur to this world."

You mean a world where Asahina-san would become someone like Wonder Woman? "This time, the changes are small in scale compared with the appearance of 'Avatars'. And Nagato-san would place remedy measures for us, so it's not that much of a problem, right? Don't you think that solving these paranormal events one at a time is a better alternative than trying to save the world from being recreated from scratch?" It's still problematic no matter which way you look at it. How about ambushing Haruhi from behind and knocking her unconscious until the school festival? "That would be too unimaginable. If you're willing to take responsibility for that, then I won't stop you." "Holding the fate of the world alone would be too heavy for my shoulders," I replied and looked at Asahina-san, who was picking the dirt off her waitress uniform with her fingers. Seems like she's pretty much given up, but when she noticed I was looking at her, she said urgently, "Oh, please don't worry about me, I'm all right. I'll think of a way to endure this…" She's just too adorable, though she doesn't look well at all. She probably has to face the prospect of getting bitten by Nagato every time something happens. Though the teeth-marks would disappear after a while, it's just uncomfortable getting bitten by her because, if Nagato were to carry a sickle instead of a magic wand in that costume, then she would be like the thirteenth Tarot card – Death. Either that, or she would be an ageless space vampire. Just being bitten by someone in that costume is enough to send one's soul to the other world.

Even though Asahina-san was dragged into all this against her will, for a time traveler from the future, she sure lacks a sense of danger. Or maybe it's because she never really told me what she really thought about this, since her world is full of classified restrictions.

Forget it. I'm sure she'll tell me eventually. How I hope we'll be in a narrow space together when she does that.

It was finally time for Taniguchi and Kunikida, as well as Tsuruya-san to make their first appearance.

Haruhi announced the roles they would be playing in the movie; it was long ago decided the three of them would be small fry characters. They would be playing "humans who have been turned into mindless zombies by the evil alien magician".

“In other words,” Haruhi said with a disquieting smile, “as Mikuru represents the side of justice, there’s no way she would lay a finger on innocent civilians, and Yuki has taken advantage of that weakness. She has controlled these humans using hypnosis, and Mikuru will end up getting badly beaten, as she is unable to strike back at the humans that attack her.”

I thought to myself, *Just how much more do you want to torture Asahina-san?* Haruhi then said, “You guys will start by pushing Mikuru into the pond.”

“EH!?”

Only Asahina-san yelled in terror, while Tsuruya-san giggled uncontrollably. Taniguchi and Kunikida exchanged glances with each other, then looked at Asahina-san with very troubled expressions.

“Hey,”

Taniguchi asked with a half-smiling face,

“Push her into the pond? The weather may be warm, but it’s autumn already! As for the water quality, no matter how you look at it, it just doesn’t look clean.”

“Su-Su-Suzumiya-san, we should at least find a warm indoor pool or something…” Asahina-san also protested with all her strength, her eyes were close to tears. Even Kunikida sided with Asahina-san.

“She’s right! What’ll happen if this is a bottomless swamp? She won’t be able to float back up once she falls in. And look, there’re a lot of black bass swimming around in there.”

Stop saying stuff that’ll make Asahina-san faint! But from past experience, the more one resists, the more stubborn Haruhi would get. She gave a very Haruhi-like response,

“Silence! Listen up! Sacrifices need to be made for the sake of realism. I had originally wanted to shoot this scene with the Loch Ness Monster! But we lack the time and budget to do that. It is our mission as humans to create the best stuff under limited time and resources, so we have no choice but to use this pond instead.”

What sort of logic is that!? Do you intend to have Asahina-san drown anyway? Can’t you substitute this with other backgrounds?

As I was considering whether to join the argument as well, someone patted me on the shoulder from behind. I turned and saw Koizumi smile and shake his head quietly. I knew. I knew if Haruhi didn’t have her way, something queer might happen. If Asahina-san ends up spitting out plasma, the Self-Defense Force might have to consider her as a hostile being.

“I-I-I’ll do it!”

Asahina-san announced with a very mournful expression, she was beyond despair now. A poor girl has decided to sacrifice herself for world peace. Things have developed to a stage where it is no longer possible to stop. But this is probably the most climatic moment of the movie, right? I'd better record this on film.

Haruhi was absolutely delighted,

"Well done, Mikuru-chan! You look awesome right now! That's the SOS Brigade member that I've chosen! How you've grown!"

I don't think this has anything to do with growing up, but the result of learning from past experience.

"Now then, you two over there hold Mikuru-chan's arms, Tsuruya-san, you grab her legs. Prepare yourselves, once I make the command, toss her into the pond with all your might."

The following scene ensued under Haruhi's direction.

The three minions start by standing in a neat row in front of Nagato, when the black mage waved her wand, they would lower their heads as though making a prayer in a Shinto shrine. Nagato waved her wand like a priest waving away bad spirits with a blank expression, in a way, she looked just like a shrine maiden.

Then, after receiving Nagato's psychic waves, the three minions started to move stiffly towards Asahina-san as though they were zombies seeking living flesh.

"I'm sorry, Mikuru, I don't want to do this. But I can't control myself, I'm really sorry." Tsuruya-san said looking very happy as she walked towards the waitress. Taniguchi, who would cower in the event of an emergency, had no idea what to say, while Kunikida scratched his head as he walked towards Asahina-san, who was looking increasingly pale.

"You two idiots over there! Be serious!"

You're the idiot around here! I took back what I was about to say and continued to roll the camera. Asahina-san slowly backed up towards the edge of the pond looking terrified.

"Prepare to die~~."

Tsuruya-san happily pushed Asahina-san down and grabbed the sides of her long fleshy legs. How should I put this? This sight looks way too dangerous.

"Kyaa…"

Asahina-san looked really scared, as Taniguchi and Kunikida grabbed hold of her arms.

"W… wait a moment, I still… I-Is this necessary?"

Ignoring Asahina-san's cries, Haruhi nodded her head and said, "This is for making the best scene, it's all for art!"

Sounds nice, but how does this crappy movie have anything to do with art!? Haruhi gave her command,

"Ready! NOW!"

Splash! Water foams splashed out from the surface, disturbing the aquatic life living in the pond.

"Ah… Help… Wah…"

This drowning act is just too realistic, Asahina-san. No, wait… How come it looks as though she's really drowning?

"My legs… Can't reach… Kya…!"

It was fortunate that this isn't the Amazon River, or she would be an ideal target for piranhas, shaking the surface of the water so frantically like that. I wonder if *black bass* attack humans? I thought as I looked through the camera lens. It was now I realized it wasn't just Asahina-san splashing the water.

"Argh! I've swallowed water!"

Taniguchi was also drowning. He probably tossed Asahina-san too strongly and fell into the pond himself as well. I decided to ignore this idiot.

"What's that moron doing?"

Haruhi came to the same conclusion as I had. Ignoring the moron, she pointed the loudspeaker towards Koizumi.

"Koizumi-kun, it's your turn to appear! Go and save Mikuru!" The male lead, who was responsible for the lighting since the beginning, gave an elegant smile and handed the reflector board over to Nagato. He then walked to the side of the pond and stuck out his hand.

"Grab my hand. Calm down, make sure you don't pull me down as well." Like a victim of a shipwreck, Asahina-san grabbed tightly onto Koizumi's arm like a piece of wooden plank. Koizumi casually pulled the completely soaked battle waitress up from the water. He then supported her by holding tight onto her. Hey! You're holding her too closely! "Are you okay?"

"…Uuuu… Cold…"

As a result of being soaked wet by water, the tight waitress uniform was now even more tightly wrapped around Asahina-san's body. If I were a member of the Motion Picture Association, I

wouldn't hesitate to give this movie a R-15 rating. To be honest, I have a feeling we might get arrested for this.

"Yes, perfect."

Haruhi slapped the loudspeaker loudly and gave a sigh of satisfaction. Not paying any attention to Taniguchi, who was still splashing the water, I pushed down the "stop" button on the camera.

We now had enough junk to open a stall, yet there was not a single towel to be found. Just what's going on? Asahina-san let Tsuruya-san wipe her face with a handkerchief as she kept her eyes shut. I held my breath as I stood by Haruhi, who was studying the taped footage with a serious look.

"Hmm, not bad."

After watching Asahina-san fall into the water three times, Haruhi nodded and continued, "Not a bad scene for the male and female protagonist to meet for the first time. Itsuki and Mikuru have perfectly conveyed that shy, clumsy feeling. Excellent." Oh really? Koizumi looked ordinary to me in that scene.

"We'll go to the next scene, where after rescuing Mikuru, Itsuki decides to hide her in his house. The next scene will start there."

Wouldn't that disrupt the continuity of the story? Where did Nagato run off to after controlling Taniguchi and the others? What about the zombies then? How were they beaten off? Even though they're just minions, if their whereabouts aren't properly accounted for, the audience won't buy the story.

"You sure are annoying! People are going to guess what happened anyway even if that scene wasn't filmed! We can just skip the unimportant bits!"

Damn it! You mean all this time you just wanted to film Asahina-san being thrown into the water!? As I was about to respond, Tsuruya-san raised her hand and said, "Um, Mikuru might catch a cold, so can I bring her to my place so she can get changed? My house is just nearby." "That's excellent!" Haruhi said to Tsuruya-san with glittering eyes, "Can I borrow Tsuruya-san's room? I'd like to film a scene where Itsuki and Mikuru get intimate together. This is going too smoothly! This movie is going to be a great success!" For someone who prefers things to be convenient, things have been going smoothly for Haruhi. Yet I can't cast away a doubt in my mind - I suspect Tsuruya-san knew Haruhi had wanted to film such a scene before making that suggestion. As Haruhi had cast Tsuruya-san as a minion, I believe Tsuruya-san should be a normal person like us, but…

"What about us?"

Kunikida asked. Taniguchi stood aside trembling while wrapping himself with his wet jacket.

“You can go home now.”

Haruhi announced coldly.

“Good job. See ya, we’ll probably not need you again.”

And so, the names and existence of these two classmates disappeared from Haruhi’s consciousness. Without looking at the stunned Kunikida and Taniguchi, who shook his wet hair like a dog, Haruhi appointed Tsuruya-san as our guide and walked off in large strides. You two sure are lucky, no longer needing to endure any more disasters. For Haruhi, you’re probably as useful as a used BB bullet. You can’t get any more fortunate than that.

For some reason, Tsuruya-san yelled happily,

“All right~~! Everybody, this way!”

She went to the front of the entourage and waved a flag.

Haruhi’s unruly behavior didn’t begin yesterday. I believe she was born that way. In fact, in five hundred years, they’ll probably have legends about Haruhi proclaiming to be the only one honored by Heaven and Earth the moment she was born, but that’s another story.

I don’t know when it began, but Tsuruya-san seems to get along very well with Haruhi, as they walk together in front of the group, singing the chorus of Bryan Adams’ “18 ‘Til I Die”. Walking behind them, I feel very ashamed for knowing them.

Nagato, the black mage, trailed silently behind them, followed by Koizumi, the lighting coordinator as well as male lead. Neither seems too concerned. You two should learn from Asahina-san, hanging down her shoulders and lowering her head slightly. And at least help me carry some of the equipment, we’ve been climbing the slope all this time and I’m beginning to understand the feeling of those racing horses trained to run uphill.

“And we’ve arrived! This is my home!”

Tsuruya-san shouted and stopped outside a residence. Her voice is impressive, even her house was impressive. Sorry, I meant extravagant. I couldn’t see the whole house from the entrance, so I had no idea how big it was, but it was enough for me to call this house big. There was hardly any other houses to be seen from the main entrance, which means it was quite a distance from the main entrance to the nearest neighboring house. I took a look around and noticed that the estate was surrounded by a huge wall, like those samurai-class mansions. Just what sort of criminal activities was she involved in order to live in such a big house?

“Come on in!”

Haruhi and Nagato didn’t seem to have any concept of common manners, as they stepped into the house as though it were their own. Asahina-san seems to have come here before, as she doesn’t look at all awed, while being pushed inwards by Tsuruya-san.

“Such a nostalgic looking house. Such an incredibly well built structure. So this is what they call buildings with a sense of architecture? Quite a contemporary building.”

Koizumi said in an exclamatory tone, without carrying any expression on his face. Are you a property salesman?

We walked through a vast space large enough to play baseball in, and then came to the entrance hall. After taking Asahina-san to the bathroom, Tsuruya-san then led us to her room.

My room was like a bed for a kitty cat compared with this room. We were led into a wide Japanese-style bedroom. The room was so wide I didn’t know where to sit, but it seemed I was the only one troubled by that. Nagato, Koizumi and even Haruhi didn’t seem to look concerned.

“Such a great room. We could even film an outdoor shoot in here. Right, this will be set as Koizumi-kun’s room then. We’ll film a scene of Koizumi-kun and Mikuru-chan getting intimate here.”

Haruhi sat on the cushion and examined the room through her fingers, which were crossed into a rectangle. The layout of Tsuruya-san’s room was simple, a simple Japanese-style bedroom with just tatami and a stove.

I followed the example of Nagato next to me and sat in traditional style, but I couldn’t take it after three minutes, and had to release my legs. Haruhi sat with her legs crossed from the beginning and whispered into Tsuruya-san’s ear.

“Hee hee! Ah, now that’ll be fun! Hold on!”

Tsuruya-san left the room carrying a very loud and pleasant laugh.

I kept thinking, *Is Tsuruya-san really a normal person?* To be able to get along happily with Haruhi, one must either be extremely queer or literally from out of this world. But it’s also possible that they just struck chords with each other.

After waiting for a few minutes, Tsuruya-san returned. The present she brought along was Asahina-san, and it’s not just a normal Asahina-san, but an Asahina-san who had just taken a bath. She was wearing what was possibly Tsuruya-san’s loose T-shirt. How should I say this? She was “only” wearing the T-shirt.

“Ah… S-Sorry to have kept everyone waiting…”

Asahina-san said, her hair still looked wet while her skin was bright red as she shyly hid behind Tsuruya-san when entering the room, and then squirmed tightly as she sat down. The shirt and the sleeves were just too long for Asahina-san, instead of calling it a T-shirt, a one-piece dress would be a better description. This only served to enhance her charm. The contact lens in her right eye, which she forgot to remove, continued to glow in a silver color, causing me to be alarmed for a while. Though it seems it would no longer be able to fire any beams or rays, so I was relieved. I really wanted to place Nagato, who was still wearing her pointed-hat and kneeling, into a Shinto temple and worship her.

"Help yourselves."

Tsuruya-san placed a tray on the tatami, which contained some glasses filled with an orange liquid. Asahina-san gulped half of the glass that Tsuruya-san handed to her. She probably lost quite a lot of water, as she had worked the hardest today.

I gratefully enjoyed my fruit juice, whereas Haruhi finished hers in one gulp, and while spinning the ice inside the glass, said,

"Well, since we have the opportunity, let's do the filming in this room!" Without any rest, filming began at once starting with the following.

Koizumi carried Asahina-san, who pretended to be asleep, into the room. For some reason, even the futon was prepared. Koizumi gently laid Asahina-san down and watched her face intently.

Asahina-san's face was flushed bright red as her eyelids trembled incessantly. Carefully and slowly Koizumi placed a blanket over a defenseless Asahina-san, then sat by her side crossing his arms.

"Um…" Asahina-san murmured in her sleep, Koizumi began to smile as he watched her the whole time.

Nagato, who probably didn't need to appear, was sitting behind me and Tsuruya-san and was still sipping her juice with a straw. Through the viewing panel, I slowly enlarged the image of Asahina-san's sleeping face. As Haruhi didn't make any directions, I was free to indulge in my own fantasies for now. Though Haruhi constantly gave commands to the two actors out there.

"Mikuru-chan, get up slowly, and slowly recite what I just told you." "…Um."

Asahina-san gradually opened her eyes, and looked at Koizumi with eyes that seemed oddly warm.

"You've awakened?" Koizumi said.

"Yes… Where am I…?"

"This is my house."

Struggling to move her upper body, Asahina-san's face looked conspicuously hot as her gaze wandered around the air. She looked notably seductive; was that part of her acting?

"Th… Thank you…"

Haruhi quickly ordered,

"Yes, that's it! Put your faces closer to each other! Mikuru-chan, close your eyes. Koizumi-kun, place your hands on Mikuru-chan's shoulders. It's fine, just push her down and kiss her!"

Asahina-san had her mouth half-open looking perplexed, while Koizumi followed Haruhi's instructions and placed his hands on Asahina-san's shoulders. My patience was already at its limit,

"Hold it! The plot's way too simplified. Why must we have this scene? What on earth is this?" "A scene where boy meets girl! A romantic scene! This scene is necessary for a movie about time-travel." Are you an idiot? Do you think this is some prime time two-hour drama shown every week? You too, Koizumi, what are you working so hard for? If this scene ever gets shown, your shoe locker will be filled with hundreds of letters cursing you the next day, use your brain for a bit.

"Hee hee, Mikuru-chan's acting… funny…"

It's not funny at all... I had wanted to say, but something was definitely wrong with Asahina-san. She's been looking so dreamy ever since the filming had begun. Her eyes looked teary, while her cheeks were red, and she didn't even resist when Koizumi grabbed her by the shoulders. It wasn't funny at all.

"Umm… Koizumi-kun, my head feels heavy…"

Asahina-san mumbled and trembled at the same time. I began to suspect whether she'd been drugged. I naturally turned my gaze to her empty glass, and found Tsuruya-san giggling and said,

"Sorry about that. I added a bit of Tequila into Mikuru's juice. I was told that a bit of alcohol enhances the realism in acting."

So this was Haruhi's plan all along? I was beyond stunned, and was close to going ballistic. How could you sneak such a thing into her drink?

"Does it really matter? Mikuru-chan looks really sexy right now. This makes things even more exciting." Haruhi said.

This no longer has anything to do with anyone's acting. Asahina-san was already shaking to and fro and looking dizzy. Her face was bright red under her closed eyes. Of course it was good that she looked sexy, but I didn't like the sight of her leaning onto Koizumi like that.

“Koizumi-kun, don’t worry, just go ahead and kiss her. On the lips, of course!” You can’t do that! How could you do this to someone that’s semi-conscious? “KOIZUMI, STOP!”

Koizumi went into deep thought, thinking whether to listen to the director or cameraman. I’m seriously going to beat you up, you bastard! At any rate, I put down the camera, since I refuse to shoot this scene, and I won’t be forced into doing it either.

“Director, this burden is too heavy for me. Besides, Asahina-san seems to have reached her limit.” “…I’m fine.”

Asahina-san said, but she didn’t look fine at all.

“Really, you’re hopeless.”

Haruhi scowled and walked towards the drunken girl,

“Huh? You’re still wearing that contact lens? You should take it off for now!” She smacked the back of Asahina-san’s head hardly.

“O… OUCH!” Asahina-san shook her head and yelled.

“Mikuru-chan, this won’t do! When your head gets smacked, you should let your contact lens fly out at once. Let’s practice again.”

Smack!

“It hurts!”

Smack!

“…KYAA!” Asahina-san shut her eyes tightly.

“STOP IT, YOU IDIOT!” I quickly grabbed Haruhi’s hand and stopped her. “What kind of practice is this? This isn’t a circus! What’s so fun about this?”

“What now? Don’t try to stop me. I planned this long ago!” “Nobody planned this with you! It isn’t funny! This is ridiculous! Asahina-san isn’t your toy!” “Well I’ve decided, Mikuru-chan *is* my toy!”

After hearing this, I could feel blood charging up to my brain, I even thought my vision was going red. I was infuriated, suddenly my impulse overrode my reasoning, and I made a subconscious reflex reaction.

Someone grabbed my wrist. I noticed Koizumi had closed his eyes and was slowly shaking his head. When I saw Koizumi holding my hand, I realized I had clutched my right fist and was about to strike at Haruhi.

“What the…?”

Haruhi’s eyes flashed brightly like a constellation of stars as she stared coldly at me.

“If you have a problem, then say it! All you need to do is just follow my orders anyway! I’m the commander and director… In any case, I won’t allow you to stand up against me!”

My eyes went red again. You stupid girl! Koizumi, let go of me! I don’t care if it’s an animal or a person, but anyone who won’t learn deserves to be taught a lesson, even if it means using my fists. Otherwise she’ll continue to repel people as though she has spikes on her back, hurting everyone for her whole life.

“No… stop!”

Asahina-san quickly ran over, and said, nearly incomprehensibly, “You can’t! You mustn’t fight…”

Standing between me and Haruhi, Asahina-san slumped to the ground with her face all red. She grabbed Haruhi’s knees and said,

“Um… Please get along well with each other… or… we’ll be…” Asahina-san said ambiguously, then slumped wearily to the ground closing her eyes, and then began to snore quietly as she fell asleep.

As I walked down the slope with Koizumi, we came across the pond where we were filming just a little while ago.

As the female lead had fallen unconscious, filming had to be stopped. Koizumi, Nagato and I decided to let Tsuruya-san take care of the sleeping Asahina-san while we would excuse ourselves. For some reason, Haruhi said she wanted to stay behind, and snatched the camera from my hand and turned around quickly. I remained silent as well and quickly carried the large amount of equipment out as Tsuruya-san led us to the door.

“I’m sorry, Kyon-kun,”

Tsuruya-san said apologetically, she then smiled again,

“I got too carried away as well! Don’t worry about Mikuru, I’ll send her home later, or she could stay here for the night.”

Nagato walked away the moment she stepped out of the door, as if she had no comment at all. Nagato’s probably like that all the time, she never has any comment for anything.

We now walked shoulder to shoulder on the way home. After about five minutes of silence, Koizumi finally spoke,

“I’ve always thought you were a calm person.”

I had thought so as well.

“Our world has already started to become erratic. I must ask you to please stop doing things that could cause a Sealed Dimension to appear.”

That’s not up to me to deal with! Isn’t that what your ‘Organization’ has been created for? You guys should be doing something!

“Regarding the incident just now, Suzumiya-san seems to have subconsciously controlled herself, and there has not been any sight of a Sealed Dimension being created. This is just my request, but please make up with her tomorrow.”

What I do is my own business. This isn’t something that can be settled by me agreeing to do what you say.

“What we should consider now is how to deal with the parts of the reality that she has affected.” Koizumi was obviously trying to change the subject. I decided to go along, “There’s no point considering, I really don’t care about what things have become.” “It’s very simple. Every time Suzumiya-san thinks up something, reality changes as well. Hasn’t it always been like that?” Images of blue giants creating havoc in a gray world appeared in my mind.

“When Suzumiya-san gives an opinion on something, we should act upon it. Our mission should be to find out the underlying motivation.”

I also recalled some glowing red spheres. Koizumi walked slowly while saying confidently, “We are basically the sedatives for Suzumiya-san’s mental state, we’re also her mental stabilizers.” “That’s… your business, right?”

“It is yours as well.”

The mysterious ex-transfer student still gave me his never-ending smile, “Our responsibility lies within the Sealed Dimension, while yours lies in the outside world, because you are the only one who can keep Suzumiya-san’s mental state stable and prevent the appearance of Sealed Dimensions. Thanks to you, for the past six months, I have been able to work less. Perhaps I should thank you properly.” “Don’t mention it.”

“Really? That would save me a lot of talking.”

Coming out of the slope and into the main road, Koizumi once again broke his silence, “Ah yes, I’d like you to come with me to a place.”

“What if I don’t want to?”

“It won’t take long. Besides, you don’t have to do anything there. Of course, you won’t be invited into a Sealed Dimension again.”

Koizumi suddenly raised his hand, and a familiar black taxi stopped in front of us.

“Now let us continue,”

Koizumi said as he leaned against the back seat of the taxi, while I looked at the back of the driver’s head.

“Right now it has become a regular routine for us to be involved with Suzumiya-san and you. Along with the other brigade members, it has become customary for us to tackle Suzumiya-san’s out of control behavior by physically countering them.”

“What a bother.”

“Maybe! But I don’t know how long this routine can last, since repeating the same things over and over again is one of the things Suzumiya-san hates most.”

She seems to enjoy herself pretty much right now. Koizumi gave a smile that lacked any sense of urgency and said,

“We need to find a way to contain Suzumiya-san’s out of control behavior within the confines of the movie.” To become a baseball player, one needs to start by swinging a bat and practice running; to become a master Go or Shougi player, one needs to start by memorizing the Go and Shougi rules; to get first place in the term-end exams, one would have a chance if they spent the whole night studying the reference books. In other words, different people may use different methods to succeed, but it all depends on effort. But, just how much effort is needed in order to remove the destructive factors within Haruhi’s brain? If I tried to stop her, she would become upset, and those hateful gray worlds might start reproducing like mad; but if I let her have her way all the time, her fantasies might just come true.

Both methods were very extreme no matter how you look at it, couldn’t she have a more moderate attitude to things? Geez… She wouldn’t be named Suzumiya Haruhi if she did things in moderation.

Outside the car, the scenery became greener as the taxi drove onto a meandering hill road. I understood at once. This was the hill that we passed by while on the bus yesterday.

A while later, the taxi stopped by the empty parking lot, which was mainly used by people visiting the shrine. It was here, yesterday, that Haruhi had committed the atrocity of shooting the shrine priest and the pigeons with her gun. It was that shrine again. Now that’s strange. Today’s Sunday… There should be more people around.

Getting out of the taxi first, Koizumi said,

“Do you still remember what Suzumiya-san said yesterday?” How am I supposed to remember every single piece of nonsense that she’s spouted out? “You’ll remember when we get there, to the inside of the shrine, that is.” Koizumi then added, “It’s been like this since this morning.” We climbed up the stone-paved stairs. We have climbed these stairs before, yesterday. At the end of the stairs would be a torii (Shrine Gateway), and then a stone path leading to the shrine itself. On the path would be lots of pigeons…

“…” I was speechless.

There were indeed pigeons all over the path, birds that pecked at the ground while moving around like a mobile carpet, but I wasn’t sure if these pigeons were the same as the ones from yesterday.

That’s because every pigeon’s feathers had become pure white in color…

“…Did someone dye their feathers?”

…Overnight.

“These white feathers are genuinely grown from their bodies. They were not dyed, and they were not caused by the colors running off either.”

Maybe someone brought a lot of white pigeons and used them to replace the pigeons from yesterday? “How is this possible? Who would do such a thing?”

I was only trying to guess, yet I knew what the answer was, but I really didn’t want to say it.

Yesterday Haruhi had said,

If possible, I’d prefer all the pigeons to be white, but I guess I can’t be picky now.

Seems like she was already being picky!

“Exactly. This is likely created by Suzumiya-san subconsciously. It was fortunate enough that there was a margin of error of just one day before the effects became apparent.”

Maybe they thought we were going to feed them? The swarming pigeons gathered under our feet. Besides us, there were no other visitors.

“Suzumiya-san’s out of control behavior is slowly seeping out from the making of the movie, into reality.” Wasn’t it enough making Asahina-san fire lasers and beams from her eye? “Why can’t we just shoot Haruhi with a tranquilizer dart and let her sleep till the end of the school festival?” Koizumi responded to my suggestion with an ironic smile, “It’s a possible solution, but are you willing to take responsibility of what happens after she has woken up?” “No thanks.”

That certainly wasn't included in my job description. Koizumi shrugged his shoulders and said, "So what should we do?"

"Isn't she a god? You worshippers ought to do something!" Koizumi intentionally gave a surprised look,

"You say Suzumiya-san is a god? Who told you that?"

"You of course!"

"Oh, did I?"

I feel like beating the crap out of this guy.

Koizumi dodged this with his usual response, "Just kidding," and then said, "In fact, I don't think there's a problem classifying Suzumiya-san as 'God.' Half of the 'Organization' has indeed treated her as a 'God.' Of course, there are doubters. Personally, I, myself, am skeptical as well. Because I believe that if she were a god, then it would not be possible for her to live in this world without being self-aware. Generally speaking, a creator should be someone watching over us from someplace afar, making miracles randomly, while calmly observing us panic over them." I knelt down, picked up a feather dropped by one of the pigeons, and spun it with my finger while remaining kneeling down. The pigeons started to rumble again. Sorry guys, I didn't bring any breadcrumbs with me today.

"This is what I think,"

Koizumi continued to ramble on,

"Someone granted Suzumiya-san omnipotent god-like powers, yet they did not allow her to become aware of it. If there were a God, then Suzumiya-san would be the person chosen by God. But no matter how you look at it, she's just a normal person."

I didn't have to think a lot on whether that girl's a normal person or not. But why did Haruhi have such omnipotent power that she's unaware of? Enough power to turn pigeon feathers white. Why? Who was behind this?

"Well, I also don't know, do you?"

He's seriously asking for a beating.

"I'm sorry," Koizumi said and then continued,

"Suzumiya-san is a creator as well as a destroyer. The reality right now may be a failed product of creation, and perhaps Suzumiya-san was given the mission to amend this flawed world."

Go on!

“If that’s the case, then we’re the ones at fault. Suzumiya-san would be the normal one, while we would become enemies of this world by getting in her way. That’s not all. Besides Suzumiya-san, the whole human race would be at fault.”

Yep, now that’d be a major problem.

“The problem lies with us who are at fault. When the world is fully amended, will we still be a part of that world? Or will we be considered as defects and get eliminated? This is something that no one can predict.”

If you can’t predict, then quit bullshitting as if you know everything.

“Yet from a certain perspective, so far, she has been unable to create a perfect world, and that is a fact. This is because her consciousness is leaning towards that of creation. Suzumiya-san is a very positive person, but what would happen if she suddenly became negative?”

This doesn’t seem like the time to remain silent, so I gave up, “What’s going to happen?”

“I don’t know. But no matter what, destroying is always easier than creating. ‘If I don’t believe in this, then let it disappear!’ If Suzumiya-san held such an attitude, then all would be reduced to naught, and everything would be eliminated. For example, if a formidable enemy were to appear before us, as long as Suzumiya-san denies their existence, then that is enough to destroy them. Be it magic or highly advanced technology, she would be able do away with them very easily.”

But Haruhi hasn’t denied everything. Is it because she still has hope in something? “That is what we are concerned about.”

Koizumi continued without looking concerned at all,

“I think there’s no way we could ever find out whether Suzumiya-san is God or a similar omnipotent being, but there’s one thing we can be sure of. If she continues to freely use her powers and it leads to the world being changed, it’s possible no one would even realize that the world had changed. The scary thing is, even Suzumiya-san doesn’t realize when the world has been altered.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because Suzumiya-san is a part of this world, proof that she isn’t the creator of this world. If she is a God who has created this world, she should be in a place outside of this world, yet here she is living with us in this world. We can only conclude that she can only alter the world to a certain extent, and this is unnatural and very strange.”

“You look even stranger to me.”

Ignoring my comment, Koizumi continued,

“I still prefer this world that I’m living in now. There may be all sorts of conflicts between various societies, but it’s only a matter of time before humans get these problems sorted out. The problem lies with theories like geocentrism. We need to make sure that Suzumiya-san doesn’t begin to believe in these ideas. Weren’t you able to come out of that Sealed Dimension with these preferences as well?”

How should I say this? I’ve forgotten about that, I decided to seal away the memories that I no longer wish to remember.

A smile formed on Koizumi’s mouth; it looked like a self-deprecating smile.

“I’m sorry. I’ve been talking too much about this unconstructive stuff as though I’m a defender of this world’s justice. Please do accept my apologies.”

Chapter 5

It was Monday morning… a week to go before the school festival starts, and yet the school was still surrounded by a relaxed atmosphere. Does this school even plan to hold a school festival at all? Shouldn't it be a bit livelier? Since the atmosphere is just too laid back, even I'm feeling unmotivated. And there were things that would make me become even more unmotivated as I approached the classroom.

Koizumi was waiting outside my classroom. You've already said so much yesterday. You still have more? "Class 1-9 has already begun rehearsals for their play. Of course, I was merely walking by." Your girly face was the last thing I wanted to see this early in the morning.

"What is it now? Don't tell me, that stupid dimension has finally appeared?" "No, yesterday, it didn't appear at all. It seems Suzumiya-san was so busy being depressed that she didn't have the time to be frustrated." Why?

"You should know… Since you don't seem to understand, then let me explain it to you. Suzumiya-san has always thought that no matter what happened, you would be her only companion. Even if you were to complain, you would still support her. No matter what she did, only you could accept her."

What are you talking about? The only ones who could accept her behavior were the Saints who have sacrificed in the name of the Lord. Let me state this for the record, I'm neither a saint, nor a great leader, I'm just an ordinary person armed with common sense.

"What's going on between you and Suzumiya-san?"

What do you mean, what's going on between us?

"Could you please cheer her up? The pigeons are cute now, but if Suzumiya-san continues to be this depressed, the shrine pigeons might turn into something that wouldn't resemble pigeons at all."

"Like what?"

"If I knew, I wouldn't be this troubled. It wouldn't be a pretty sight if the shrine were crawling with slimy tentacled creatures all over the place, would it?"

"Try spreading some salt."

“This doesn’t solve the root of the problem. Right now Suzumiya-san is in limbo; she has been actively trying to improve her situation through the making of her movie. But since she got into a quarrel with you yesterday, her energy is now being channeled in the other direction – from positive to negative. It would have been manageable if it had it ended right there, but if this were to continue, things might become complicated.”

“So, you’re asking me to console her?”

“It’s not that hard, is it? All you need to do is make up with her.” What do you mean make up with her? I’ve never gotten along well with her before.

“Huh? I’ve always thought you were a calm and reasonable person. Could I have been mistaken?” I kept silent.

The reason I was so mad at her yesterday was because I couldn’t stand the sight of her bullying Asahina-san… Sort of… Or maybe I was calcium deficient. So, last night, I drank a whole liter of milk and surprisingly, my temper had eased a lot by the time I woke up this morning. However, milk is just a form of sedative.

Anyway, why should I swallow my pride and console her? No matter which way you look at it, it’s hard to dismiss that this girl has gone too far.

Koizumi began to purr like a kitty cat starting to nibble on its food, and patted me on the shoulder, “I’m counting on you because, in terms of distance, you are the closest person.”

As long as I didn’t turn around, I wouldn’t make any eye contact with Haruhi sitting behind me. Today, Haruhi seems to be paying rather special attention to the sky, as she spent most of the time looking out of the window, and this lasted until lunchtime.

For some reason, even Taniguchi was full of shit today,

“What kind of movie was that? I don’t even know why I wasted my time coming!” During lunch, Taniguchi cursed as he munched on his lunch. Haruhi is usually away from the classroom during this time, and today was no exception. He wouldn’t be saying such things if she were around. He’s the sort of coward that only speaks out loud when it’s safe.

“This is all Suzumiya’s fault. This is going to be a crappy movie, I’m sure of it!” I really wouldn’t give a damn about anyone’s opinion. I don’t consider myself a great leader, and I don’t intend to leave my name in the annals of history. I’m just a small character standing in a corner and mumbling by myself. I excel at finding the most minor fault within my mom’s cooking, even though I can’t cook myself.

But this was something where I had to make myself clear, so I spoke, “The last thing I want to hear is you complaining.”

Taniguchi, what have you ever done? At least Haruhi took part in the school festival and tried her best to do something, though she would end up giving us a lot of trouble. But at least she’s way better than those idiots that do nothing but complain all day. You moron! You ought to apologize to all the Taniguchis in Japan, for all your namesakes out there, you’re nothing but a disgrace to them!

“Forget it, Kyon.”

Kunikida tried to mediate.

“He’s just venting his frustration. Actually we’d like to hang out more with Suzumiya-san. We’re really envious of you, Kyon.”

“Like hell we are,” Taniguchi said glaring at Kunikida, “I’m not joining that idiotic club.” “That’s odd coming from you, just who was it that agreed to come right away when asked to? Weren’t you feeling giddy yesterday? You even canceled your original plans for the day.” “Stop picking on me, dumbass!”

So that’s why Taniguchi is so pissed. He specifically canceled all his plans for that day, just so he could enthusiastically come help as an extra, but he barely appeared in one shot and even ended up nearly drowning. I see, he does deserve some sympathy, but I didn’t feel like sympathizing with him now because I am just as pissed.

I knew better than everyone else that Haruhi’s movie was too stupid to be watched by anyone, because she only knows how to charge forward without thinking of consequences. Since we only filmed whatever she came up with, there was no script to speak of. Only a genius could turn this movie into a success. And in my opinion, Haruhi doesn’t really have talent as a director, but if people start to criticize her because of that… Wait, why am I so angry with that?

“Kyon, Suzumiya-san seems to be in a worse mood than usual, did something happen?” I listened to Kunikida’s question while thinking.

I was the same as Taniguchi. All I ever did was follow whatever she said, and then curse at her behind her back. I sense a bit of myself when observing this guy. Sometimes cursing at Haruhi, sometimes feeling helpless… That was my job. But it was a job that can only be done by me, and no one else

I was feeling so frustrated that even the food tasted bland. I feel sorry for my mom who made this lunch for me. Damn it, Taniguchi, you idiot. If you hadn't said some useless stuff, I wouldn't be doing things that I would later regret.

Just what have I done?

I closed the lid of my lunchbox and bolted out of the classroom.

Haruhi was in the clubroom, connecting the video camera to the computer; she seemed to be working on something. She looked up in shock when I suddenly opened the door. Was that a curry bun she was holding in her left hand?

She frantically threw the bun away, then put her hand behind her hair… I think. At this point her hair opened up. I don't know why she did that, as if she was trying to quickly untie the hair that she had tied up behind her head. I didn't notice it too carefully, since I could think about that later. I then said what I needed to be say to her,

"Hey, Haruhi."

"What?"

Haruhi went into defensive mode, looking like a kitten. I said to that face of hers, "We need to make this movie a success!"

That's what they call impulse, right? A person like me would probably go emotional about twice a year, because of this, I was angry yesterday. The timing was just perfect. And today, this impulse was caused by Koizumi's ambiguous words and Taniguchi's stupid face. Not to mention Haruhi looking melancholic made me very frustrated and uneasy. If I had let these feelings build up inside of me, I'd have probably ended up smashing the classroom window, so I had to do away with these feelings right now. Why must I justify whatever I do?

"Hmph."

Haruhi then said boastfully,

“Of course we will. After all, I’m the director. Success is already guaranteed. I don’t need you to state the obvious.”

Such a simple person. Just when I had thought she was beginning to show some gentle feelings worthy of praise. Yet the enigmatic light within Haruhi’s eyes was once again reignited with flames of confidence. I have no idea where she gets her fuel. She’s just too simple. She’s like an RPG boss that keeps casting regenerative spells on herself, but I couldn’t care less. She needs to be more balanced. She should finish off the players in one blow and quickly bring out the “Game Over” screen… What am I talking about? Ah yes, those sort of pressure-reducing games just don’t exist. I’m not sure what this means, since it has no meaning to begin with, but anyway, I don’t like seeing Haruhi looking depressed, and I don’t want to see her like that again. She was made to run aimlessly in those marathons that are endless, pointless, and without destination. It’s just… If she were to suddenly stop in her tracks, she might subconsciously do something totally unnecessary, that’s all.

…That was about what I was thinking then.

That same day, after school…

“Couldn’t you have said it better?” Koizumi said.

“I’m sorry.” I replied.

“Though you have indeed raised her spirits, I had wished you would have expressed it… without raising further obstacles.”

“…Sorry.”

“Instead of things going back to normal, the situation has now become even more extreme.”

“…”

“There’s no way we can conceal this.”

Koizumi looked at me with his deep-colored eyes as I contemplate. He didn’t sound like he was blaming me, but his voice sounded very melancholic. Is that so? Things have become worse, and it looks like it’s because of me.

Why's that? How should I know?

There were cherry blossoms everywhere. This was the cherry blossom path by the riverside, where Asahina-san revealed her true identity to me. Let us reconfirm the season again: it is autumn right now. There were still some remnants of summer within the air, but normally, Japanese cherry blossoms usually bloom in spring. It is usually acceptable if a flower blossoms earlier than its usual season, but to blossom half a year early was way too ridiculous. Were the cherry blossoms going as crazy as the sun itself?

Under the falling cherry blossom petals, only Haruhi had her engines fired up. Wearing her tight waitress costume, Asahina-san wavered and walked aimlessly. Was it because she was unsettled by the flowers blossoming in the wrong season?

"I never thought things would go my way so easily. I was just thinking of filming a scene full of cherry blossoms! This rare meteorological event sure is coincidental!"

Haruhi spouted out, while making Asahina-san stand in all sorts of poses.

It was impossible after all. Whenever people do something impulsively, it is always their future selves that suffer. It feels like I have continually been learning this lesson for the past six months.

And I wasn't meditating on, "I should've done that," but rather, "I *shouldn't* have done that." A very negative thought indeed. Someone give me a gun! A real gun! Not a toy gun!

The cherry blossom trees seemed to start blossoming after noon, and the petals started to fall by evening. The local television station even reported this as a rare event, how I wish they would just think of this as a one-off freak incident. Just blame it all on the abnormal events caused by the climate change of recent years, OK?

"That's what Suzumiya-san seems to think."

Koizumi said while walking shoulder to shoulder with Asahina-san. The sight of Koizumi, with his superficial good looks, and Asahina-san, who is genuinely pretty, standing together is enough to enrage all the males in this world. I was certainly feeling pissed by this.

Nagato had no comment about the petals floating about, as she carried her usual blank expression and stared at the petals, whose biological clocks were completely messed

up. The pink petals landed on her black cloak, creating a strong contrasting effect. Does she know about the pigeons?

“That’s right! Let’s grab a cat!”

Haruhi said, suddenly.

“A sorceress ought to have a familiar, and what better than a cat? Where can we find a black cat? And we need a good looking one as well.”

Hang on, wasn’t Nagato supposed to be an evil alien magician? “What’s the difference? Let’s go! That’s what I’ve visualized anyway. Where can we find a cat?” “In the pet store, of course!”

Surprisingly Haruhi made a compromise after hearing my casual suggestion, “A wild cat would do. We probably need to borrow and return one from the pet store. It’s too bothersome. Is there an empty patch of land where we can find wild cats? Yuki, do you know?” “Yes.”

Nagato nodded slightly, then she began to walk as though leading us to the Promised Land like a religious leader. What else does Nagato not know? If I asked her where the wallet I lost five years ago was, she would probably tell me, since it contained all the wealth I had then, which was about 500 Yen.

About fifteen minutes later, we arrived at the back of the deluxe apartment block where Nagato lived. There was a well-trimmed lawn surrounded by trees, which obscures the view from the outside. A few cats were gathered there. They looked like wild cats, but they weren’t afraid of people. When I walked towards them, they didn’t try to run away, maybe they thought we were going to feed them? Some of them even purred under our legs. Haruhi picked up one of the cats and said,

“Aren’t there any black cats? All right, we’ll use this cat then!” It was a spotted cat, not to mention it’s male. Yet Haruhi had no idea how much of a pedigree this cat had, and she wasn’t in awe by the cat she had randomly picked up.

“Here Yuki, this is your partner. Get along well with him.” Nagato received the cat with a blank expression as though she’d received a tissue pack distributed by those street salesmen, and the cat also carried a blank expression as it was carried over to her hands.

Filming started right away, and as this was the rear of an apartment block, location no longer seemed to be a concern in making this movie. My camera was already stuffed

with scenes that just came out of the director's mind from time to time. I'm not in charge of editing all these broken scenes into a coherent story, am I?

"Yuki, attack Mikuru-chan!"

At Haruhi's command, Nagato knelt in an odd manner and turned into a black mage with a cat on her left shoulder. No matter how one looked, the cat just looked too heavy. It was good that the cat obediently clung onto Nagato's shoulder, but Nagato's whole body was tilted to one side as a result. She even tried her best to keep her balance to prevent the cat from falling off. She maintained this unnatural stance while waving her wand towards Asahina-san,

"Take this."

I believe incredible beams would be emitted from Nagato's wand in this scene, right?
"…Kyaa!"

Asahina-san yelled as though suffering from excruciating pain.

"And, cut!"

Haruhi shouted satisfactorily, and I stopped the recording at once, while Koizumi placed down the reflector board he was carrying.

"I want that cat to talk. He is the cat of a magician after all. He needs to at least say something mean." Now this is ridiculous.

"Your name is Shamisen. Hey, Shamisen! Say something!" How is he supposed to talk? No, actually, I beg you, please don't speak.

Perhaps my prayers were answered, as the cat with the ominous name Shamisen didn't start speaking Japanese, but instead licked his tail and totally ignored Haruhi's command. This was natural, but I still breathed a sigh of relief.

"Everything is going according to plan."

Haruhi reviewed the footage taken today and smiled happily. It's as though her depression this morning never happened at all. It was good that she cheered up so quickly, and for once I was impressed with her.

"Kyon, you're in charge of looking after the cat."

Haruhi folded her director's chair and gave me this unreasonable command, "Take good care of him when you bring him home, because we still need him for further filming. Tame him well! Teach him a trick by tomorrow, like jumping through a fire hoop or something." If the cat can obediently cling onto Nagato's shoulders, then I guess it should be clever enough for that, right? "That's it for today, tomorrow will be the final day of shooting! Filming today went smoothly, the story's about to enter its climax, and everyone's managed to maintain their spirits! Go get some rest, we'll need that spirit for tomorrow as well!" Haruhi waved her loudspeaker and dismissed us, then went home on her own while humming the ending theme to "Blade." "Phew…"

Both Asahina-san and I sighed, Koizumi placed the reflector board under his arms and prepared to leave, while Nagato stared blankly at Shamisen like an inkless pen.

I knelt down and caressed the cat's head,

"Thanks for the hard work. Maybe I'll buy some cat food for you, or would you prefer dried fish?" "I'm fine either way."

A clear male baritone voice said the above sentence, and it wasn't spoken by anyone here. I saw Koizumi and Asahina-san looking stunned, then turned to look at Nagato's poker face. They all had their sights fixed on one place – my feet.

There by my feet stood the cat, who looked up at me with his round black eyes wide open.

"Hey!" I said, "Did you just speak, Nagato? I wasn't asking you. I was asking the cat." "That's what I thought as well, so I answered you. Did I say something wrong?" So said the cat…

"Now that took me by surprise…"

Koizumi said.

"It's too shocking, a cat actually speaking…"

Asahina-san said.

"…"

Nagato remained silent as she picked up Shamisen, who then spoke, “I don’t understand why you’re so shocked.”

He said while clinging his paws onto Nagato’s shoulders.

A demon cat… Is that what cats become after living for a few years? “I’m not sure myself. The concept of time does not concern me. What is the present? What is the past? I have no interest in that.” It was already amazing that he could speak, but little did we expect him to say such abstract stuff as well. Now don’t be getting cocky, you’re just a fur ball. I wonder if we should auction off Shamisen on the internet? “For you, I probably have made sounds that sound like human speech, but aren’t parrots the same? From what did you deduce that I have made sounds that conveyed literal meaning?” What the hell are you talking about?

“From this conversation, since you have precisely answered my question.” “Maybe the sounds that I made just happened to match the nature of your question.” “If that’s the case, then wouldn’t that mean the conversations human beings make with each other are all meaningless?” Why on earth am I having a serious conversation with a cat? Shamisen the wild cat licked his front paws and rubbed under his ears and said, “Exactly. You may have carried out what seemed like a conversation with that lady, but no one is sure if both of you have conveyed what each of you wanted to say,” Shamisen said with his deep voice.

“That’s because each person may or may not say what’s in their heart depending on the situation,” Koizumi replied.

You shut up!

“Now that you mention it… It does make sense,” Asahina-san said.

I’m sorry, could you please not agree with the cat as well? I examined every other cat on the lawn, besides Shamisen, all the other cats made a “meow” or “purr” noise. Seems like it’s just this cat that has gained the ability to utter human languages. How can this be?

It’s all that stupid girl’s fault.

“Looks like things have taken a turn for the worse.”

Koizumi elegantly sipped his mocha and continued,

“It seems we have underestimated Suzumiya-san,”

“What do you mean?” Asahina-san asked in a lowered voice.

“The movie world created by Suzumiya-san has begun to become a part of this reality. The movie contents that she visualized, have manifested themselves into this world, and have become a part of our reality. Like how Asahina-san could fire lasers or how the cat could talk. If she suddenly says, ‘I want to film a scene of a giant meteorite falling to Earth,’ it might just happen.”

Right now, besides Haruhi, the other four members of the SOS Brigade were now gathered inside the cafe in front of the station. Koizumi had proposed an emergency meeting to deal with Haruhi, a plan to which we all agreed. It looks like things are getting serious. At first glance, we seemed like a bunch of high school students gathering together while chatting merrily (though it was only Koizumi that smiled merrily), but what we were actually doing sounded like a bunch of suspicious villains plotting to stop the Defender of Justice from using her ultimate attack. By the way, we let Shamisen wait at the grass lawn outside, and we specifically told him not to talk to anyone, or even respond to anyone’s questions. The cat did not look displeased, and merely said, “Okay.” He then sat quietly by the shade of the tree by the roadside and watched us leave.

“What’s going to happen from now on…?”

Asahina-san said, looking very concerned. The poor girl seemed very troubled, since she has been permanently scarred mentally by Haruhi’s movie. Nagato maintained her blank expression and was still dressed all in black.

Koizumi slowly sipped his warm milk coffee and said,

“All I know is, we can’t leave Suzumiya-san unattended like that,” I swallowed the ice water in one gulp, since I’ve already finished drinking my glass of apple tea, “So aren’t we supposed to find a way to stop Haruhi?”

“Who else can stop her from making this movie? I don’t have the confidence to.” Neither did I.

Once the engine is started, as long as Haruhi doesn’t turn it off, she would go on non-stop. She would be like a dead fish if she ever stopped. If we trace her ancestral bloodline, we could probably find traces of tuna and bonito DNA in it.

Nagato doesn't seem to be even thinking as she silently drank her almond tea. Maybe she really wasn't thinking, or maybe because she understood everything, there was no need to think further, it's even possible that she simply isn't good at talking. After spending six months with her, I still find it hard to figure out what she's thinking.

"What about you, Nagato? What do you think of this?"

"…"

Nagato placed her cup onto the tray without making a sound, then smoothly turned her head to look at me and said,

"Unlike last time, Suzumiya Haruhi will not disappear from this world." Her voice is so cool and crisp.

"The Integrated Data Sentient Entity deduces that this is enough." Koizumi placed a hand elegantly over his forehead and said, "But that would be troublesome for us."

"Not for us. We look forward to seeing changes in our observation subject." "Is that so?"

Koizumi quickly decided to ignore Nagato from then on and turned back towards me, "Then, which genre should we classify Suzumiya-san's movie as?" Sigh, once again he has spoken in an ambiguous way.

"The structure of the story can be divided into three forms. First, it could occur within a certain framework. Second, it could break through this framework and create a new framework. Third, it could repair the broken framework back to its original state."

As expected, he began his lengthy speech in Martian, which would lead people to think, "What the hell is he talking about?" Asahina-san, you don't have to seriously listen to his bullshit!

"As we exist within this framework, if we want to understand our world, we need to think rationally, or grasp it through observation."

What on earth is this "framework" then?

"Try thinking about this 'reality' we are in now. This world is such that we can exist in our current state. Conversely, the movie that Suzumiya-san is making is fiction to us."

Isn't that obvious?

“The real problem now is that things that only exist in the fictional world have now affected our ‘reality.’” The eyes of Wonder Mikuru, the pigeons, the cherry blossom, and the cat.

“We must stop the fictional world from creeping further into our reality.” I always felt Koizumi looked rather enthusiastic whenever he’s talking about this stuff, he looked quite cheerful. To counter that, I decided to put out a gloomy face.

“The making of this movie has acted as a filter for Suzumiya-san to manifest her powers. To prevent this, we must let Suzumiya-san realize that ‘this is all fiction.’ Because right now, she has unwittingly blurred the lines between fiction and reality.”

You sure sound excited about this!

“We must find a rational way to prove that things from the fictional world aren’t real. We must make sure this movie is completed in a reasonable way.”

“So how are we going to normalize the fact that a cat can now talk?” “Normalize isn’t the correct term. Because in this way, a world will be created where cats could talk. In our ‘reality,’ cats can’t talk. If no one finds anything wrong with a talking cat, then the consequences could be dire, because in our world it is simply impossible for cats to talk.” “Then what about aliens, time travelers and espers? Is their existence just a possibility?” “Well, of course, since they are existing right now. In our world, this is a very normal thing, though the catch is that we mustn’t let Suzumiya-san know about this.” Really?

“Let’s assume our world to be an object observed from afar. If she believes the ‘real world’ to be what you once used to believe it to be, a world without supernatural phenomena – where aliens, time travelers and espers don’t exist – then this ‘reality’ we’re in would be a totally fictional world.”

So is this the true face of God you’ve been talking about? “But that is what is observed from afar. You have learned first-hand that supernatural phenomena do, in fact, exist in this world – which includes Nagato-san and myself. Since we’re here, you can only accept this fact within the confines of this world. I’m sure you have a different view of the world than you had one year ago.” Perhaps I would be happier if I never knew this fact.

“How should I put it? Hmm, I can confirm this. Right now Suzumiya-san’s status is just like how you were in the past. In other words, she still hasn’t changed how she views this reality. She may talk a lot about it, but deep inside she doesn’t believe that supernatural phenomena actually exist. Let’s take what she has seen as an example;

she has treated the appearance of Sealed Dimension and ‘Avatars’ as a dream. As dreams are fictional, the ‘reality’ of this world gets to be maintained.”

That’s what we’ve been working hard to maintain all the time.

“Right, therefore there’s no doubt that fiction can be manifested into reality. If Suzumiya-san treats these occurrences as ‘fact,’ then the talking cat would be incorporated into this ‘reality.’ As it would be strange in this world for cats to talk, in order to allow talking cats to become part of ‘reality,’ the world would have to be reconstructed. Does Suzumiya-san want to create a world where cats can talk? I don’t think the world would reach the realm of science fiction completely, since judging from her way of thinking, I don’t think she would do something so troublesome. Though it’s also possible the world could become the stuff of science fiction at once, where no reason is needed to explain why cats can talk. As long as ‘talking cats’ existed, that could be enough for her. There would be no question as to ‘why cats can talk,’ since the world would become a place where it’s natural for cats to talk.”

Koizumi put down his mocha and toyed with the edge of the mug with his fingers as he said, “This would be problematic, as it would overthrow all the concepts already known to mankind. In my own way, I respect how humans make observations and come to conclusions. Under this method, it is impossible, without any external influences, to find a cat in this world that can talk through mere observation alone. It is very strange to us for a talking cat to exist in this world.” Then how do you explain your existence? Aren’t espers the same as talking cats? “You’re right. For this world, we’re still an anomaly. Not confined to any known rules of this reality. We only exist thanks to Suzumiya-san. This cat is the same, because Suzumiya-san wishes to let him appear in this movie, which is why he exists. From what I can understand, Suzumiya-san is trying to create a link with this reality and the fictional elements of the movie she is trying to make.” Now is not the time to understand, now is the time to figure out what we should do! “Which is why we need to categorize which genre this movie belongs to.” How I wish he wouldn’t push so far. While it may be gratifying to show off one’s ability to speak lengthily, one ought to consider the feelings of the audience as well! Your long speech is just as annoying as the ones the principal makes in the morning school assembly every week. Just look, even Asahina-san has been looking perplexed since the beginning.

But Koizumi did not intend to stop here,

“If all this happened in the fictional world, then no explanation is needed as to why the cat could talk or how Asahina-san could fire beams from her eyes. Since in that world, ‘it’s a matter of fact.’”

I turned my gaze out of the window to make sure Shamisen was still there.

“But, if there is a reason for talking cats and the Mikuru Beam to exist, then from the moment it existed, then it’s possible that it would be discovered by someone. The reality where cats can talk and where Asahina-san fires beams actually does exist, it’s just that no one has noticed it yet – by observation, its existence will eventually be proven. Yet at that moment, our whole world will change completely. We would now need to readjust our knowledge of this world, from one where paranormal events don’t exist to one where they do exist, as the world we thought we once knew has now become a fictional world.”

I sighed deeply. Is there no way to shut this guy up?

So this is what you’re trying to say: a sufficient reason is required to explain the existence of talking cats. But if that’s the case, how do you explain the existence of you, Nagato and Asahina-san? Aren’t you, along with the both of them, part of those supernatural phenomena?

“It’s probably like that for you, as no further explanation is needed. For you, the world has already changed. Isn’t the world you knew when you first entered high school different from the world you know now? Your concept of reality has now changed for good. Haven’t you been encountering new realities? And haven’t you confirmed that people like us really do exist?”

“What are you trying to say?”

“Let us return the subject to the movie itself, the movie Suzumiya-san is trying to make can probably be classified into the science fiction genre. In this movie, no reason is needed to explain why cats can talk or why Asahina-san and Nagato-san possess magical powers. It was enough that way.”

So, all we need to do is give some meaning to the existence of the demonic cat, the waitress from the future and the evil alien magician?

“Not exactly, because by giving them their raison d’etre it would be bothersome for the outside world. If the observer realizes that ‘the world has changed’ after watching the movie from beginning to end, then their existence would be acknowledged, and the world will change into one where it’s not a big deal for cats to talk. I do not wish for the world to get any more complicated than it is.”

Neither do I. The only ones unbothered would be probably Nagato and her people, I guess.

“I said before that we need to decide the context of this movie, all we need to do is to just ask her which direction this movie is going. The context should be such as to dispel all the questions raised by the mysteries and paranormal events occurring within the movie, and through a reasonable ending, it should pull the distorted world back into its original form. There is one context that allows the world to be resurrected when it is about to end, and is able to find a reasonable answer to all sorts of mysterious events.”

What context is that?

“The deduction context, especially through basic deduction. Once we have made such a context, all surreal scenes could be dealt with by people saying ‘I don’t believe this,’ and the paranormal events would be ignored easily. All we need to do then is just make it look like the talking cat and Asahina-san’s lethal beams are some sort of elaborate hoax, and our reality would remain intact, am I right?”

The cafe waitress was rather troubled by Asahina-san’s costume, yet she pretended not to see that while collecting our empty glasses. Koizumi waited till she left, then continued,

“Obviously, a talking cat is beyond the confines of common sense, yet the talking cat does exist. In other words, things that are not supposed to exist have now appeared. For our world, this is a very inconvenient fact.”

He flicked the water droplets on his glass with his finger and said, “In order to solve this problem, the movie must have a reasonable ending. One that is theoretically acceptable by everyone – or rather, by Suzumiya-san. An ending where talking cats, time travelers and alien magicians can exist.” “Is there such an ending?”

“Of course! It’s quite simple. All we need to do is to find a perfect explanation in the ending for all the unreasonable events that have occurred before.”

What’s your explanation then?

“It is all but a dream.”

“…”

We were all engulfed by a deafening silence. After a while, Koizumi spoke again, “I’m not joking…”

I looked contemptuously at this gentleman toying with his hair parting with his fingers and said, “You think Haruhi would accept such an explanation? She’s serious about getting a prize, she wouldn’t care whether the movie’s real or not. And now you’re saying it’s all just a dream? No matter how dumb she is, she’s not going to make a movie that stupid.” “Of course I have taken her feelings into account when making this conclusion, this is merely the most convenient ending for us. Having her declare that the movie is nothing but a dream, a hoax, or all made up would be the best solution possible.” For you maybe… It’s probably not a bad solution for me either, but what would Haruhi think of it? She has probably thought up a very shocking ending that she would be very pleased with.

Besides, I don’t want to get involved in dream-like affairs anymore. Furthermore, I don’t want to hear you pouring out long speeches at us, which aren’t fun at all anymore.

On the way home, I decided to stop by the pet food store. I bought the cheapest cat food bowl and some cat food at a special discount price, I even asked for a receipt before stepping out of the store. Shamisen wiped his face with his front paws and looked at me. The cat followed me as I began to walk.

“Now listen up. When we get home, don’t say a single word and behave like how a cat should behave.” “I don’t know what you mean by how cats behave, but since you have requested, I’ll just have to obey.” “Look, just don’t talk to me. And answer everything with a meow.” “Meow.”

My sister and mom widened their eyes at the sight of me bringing a wild cat home. I used the excuse that I thought up of earlier which was, “His owner needed to go on a trip and has asked me to take care of him.” To which they accepted gracefully, especially my sister, who cheerfully caressed Shamisen, while the demon-cat simply purred. Isn’t that rather un-catlike for you?

After a relatively peaceful night, I still had to return to school today. I wasn’t comfortable with leaving Shamisen at home, so I brought him to school as well. As I urged him to hide inside my bag, Shamisen replied boastfully, “All right then.” And crawled into the bag. I won’t let him out till we reach the school!

It was only a few days away from the school festival, the atmosphere within the school has begun to get more livelier as though in synchrony with Haruhi's enthusiasm. What ever happened to yesterday's relaxed atmosphere?

The early morning was filled with the sound of musical instruments and people singing, and there were people making signboards and notices everywhere. There were even people wandering around in all sorts of weird costumes, I had no idea which show they were participating in. Judging from such a situation, it wouldn't be strange if one or two sliders from a parallel universe were to blend into this crowd. It was only the people of Class 1-5 who had no enthusiasm whatsoever. Maybe it's because Haruhi sucked all their enthusiasm away?

When I entered the classroom, I found Haruhi already sitting on her seat and writing something vigorously.

"So you've finally decided to write a script?"

I walked to my desk as I asked. Haruhi hummed loudly and lifted her chin highly as she replied, "Of course not! This is the promotional flyer for the movie!" "Let me see!"

She picked up her notebook and hovered it in front of my face.

Asahina Mikuru-chan's Precious Secret Video Collection Revealed! You'll regret it if you miss this! The SOS Brigade proudly presents – The most stunning movie of the year! Come see what it's all about! On it the above provocative words were written along with some other stuff about how the year's going to end soon. I don't really mind this, but wouldn't it mislead people into thinking only Asahina-san would appear in the movie? If someone can actually figure out what sort of movie this is just by reading the above promo, I'd look at him with a new light of respect. Frankly, even as the cameraman, I don't know what sort of movie we're making, and I never had much of a chance to express my opinions on the topic. She's probably not sure of it herself. Nevertheless, she sure knows how to write this many words for a flyer.

"I'm going to make copies of the flyer and give them out at the school entrance during the festival. Hmm, the response would be great! I don't think Okabe would say anything if I wore a bunny-girl costume during the school festival, right?"

No, I still think he would have something to say about it. This is a prefectural high school with decently strict rules, after all. So it's better if you stop giving the school deans any more stomachaches!

“Besides, Asahina-san has to prepare for her class’s food stall. Not to mention Koizumi and Nagato have activities with their classes as well. We’ll be the only ones free that day.”

Haruhi looked at me with suspicious looking eyes,

“So you’re saying you want to dress up as a bunny-girl?” How is that even possible? Just you would be enough. As for me, I’ll be standing behind carrying the promo board for you.

“By the way, you do know there’s only a few days left till the school festival this Saturday and Sunday, right?” “Of course I do.”

“Oh really? Seeing as to how relaxed you are, I would have thought that you’ve had the dates confused.” “How am I relaxed? Don’t you see me trying to think of more provocative words?” “Besides advertising, shouldn’t you be focused on more important matters? When’s the movie going to be finished?” “Soon. All that’s left is a few more retakes, then we’ll edit the scenes together, and then we’ll just add in the background music and visual effects during post-production and we’re done.” Now that’s surprising. Personally I feel that the number of retakes we require far outnumber the scenes we have already filmed. What movie was this director trying to make anyway? Not to mention we probably need to spend even more time in post-production work, I just hope I’m wrong.

During recess, between the third and fourth period.

“Kyon-kun!”

Her voice was so loud it could blow everyone inside the classroom into mid-air. Out of reflex, I turned to where the voice came from, and saw Tsuruya-san sticking her head into the classroom door. I can barely make out Asahina-san’s soft hair by her side.

“Come over here.”

I rushed over as though being drawn by Tsuruya-san’s smile. Haruhi maintained her habit of being out of sight from the classroom during recess, so she wasn’t here then. Probably wandering off somewhere in school. This was a great chance.

I came out to the corridor and Tsuruya-san pulled my sleeve at once and said, "Mikuru has something to say to you!"

Asahina-san trembled as she handed me a small piece of paper, "This… Um, it's a promotional voucher."

"That's the voucher for our class's fried noodle stall!" Tsuruya-san further explained.

I graciously received it at once. It's probably a discount voucher or something like that. According to the printed words on the chopped voucher, I could get thirty percent off with this when ordering noodles.

"Please do come with your friends."

Asahina-san lowered her head deeply while Tsuruya-san opened her mouth as wide as a comic book character and smiled,

"That's all for now! See ya!"

Tsuruya-san said and prepared to leave, Asahina-san also followed suit, but then decided to come back towards me. Tsuruya-san giggled when she saw this and stopped to wait for us.

Asahina-san clasped her fingers together and said to me, "…Kyon-kun,"

"Yes?"

"About what Koizumi-kun said the other day, I think it's better if you don't believe like that… Maybe you would think I have issues with Koizumi-kun if I say that… Um, I don't like it that way as well, but…"

"You mean him calling Haruhi a God?"

If you mean that, don't worry, I don't believe him either.

"I, um… I have a different view on this, which means, um… It's different from Koizumi-kun's explanation." Asahina-san sighed and looked at me with her eyes opened wide, "Suzumiya-san does indeed possess the power to change the 'present,' but I don't think she has the ability to reconstruct the world. This world has been this way since the beginning, it's not created by Suzumiya-san." If that's the case… Does that mean her views are in contrast with Koizumi's? "I believe Nagato-san thinks differently about it as well." Asahina-san said while twirling the tip of her uniform with her fingers, "Um… If I say this, people wouldn't feel comfortable about it, but…"

Tsuruya-san smiled looking at us as she stood from a distance, carrying the face of a mother swallow looking forward to seeing her offspring leave the nest at last. I wonder if she's got the wrong idea about this? Asahina-san sounded very stiff as she said,

"Koizumi-san's views are different from ours. If I asked you to… Um… Not believe Koizumi-kun so easily, I sound like I'm criticizing him, but…"

She frantically waved her hands,

"I'm sorry, I can't explain this properly. I'm no good in saying this… I mean…" She kept lowering her head and then looking up at me repeatedly, "Koizumi-kun's people have their own stance and theories, and so do we. I think Nagato-san's the same as well, so…" Asahina-san looked at me as though finally mustering all her courage to decide something. She's still so cute even when she looks this serious. I trembled in joy at being able to observe her pretty face from such a close distance. I confidently replied to her, "I know, how could Haruhi possibly be a god?"

Instead of donating to that jerk's religion, I'd rather have Asahina-san set up a new religion and worship her as its founder. She'd probably attract more believers this way. I'd probably make a seal of approval just to guarantee this.

"For me, Asahina-san's explanation is much easier to understand than Koizumi's." Asahina-san revealed a cheerful smile; I guess this is how sweet beans would look if they could smile.

"Um, thank you. But Koizumi-kun isn't included within myself, please understand." She said some very ambiguous words, then looked up at me, and then quickly turned around as though trying to run away. I wasn't even trying to hug you.

Asahina-san waved gently at me, then she followed Tsuruya-san like a black duckling following her mother and left.

We really ought to speed up our progress. I headed towards the clubroom while wondering why I was thinking about this so seriously. I had wanted to use the computer for a while, but I didn't expect someone would already be sitting inside, wearing her pointed hat and black cloak while reading her book.

Before I could say anything,

“I believe this is what Asahina Mikuru thinks,”

Nagato said as though she could read my mind.

“Suzumiya Haruhi isn’t the creator and was not responsible for the creation of this world. This world has existed in this state since long ago. The supernatural existence of espers, temporal anomalies and alien life forms wasn’t created through the wishes of Suzumiya Haruhi, and has existed since long before that. Suzumiya Haruhi’s task is to unconsciously discover the existence of these beings. She started using her abilities three years ago, but her discoveries have not led her to become self-aware. She is able to search for the paranormal, but it contradicts with her own views on the paranormal world. This is because one faction is still preventing her from becoming self-aware.”

She calmly spoke without even smiling. Nagato looked at me with her piercing eyes as she said the above, she then said the following before closing her mouth,

“And that would be us.”

“Asahina-san has different explanations from Koizumi. Would it become inconvenient if Haruhi were to witness something extraordinary?”

“Yes.”

Nagato turned her gaze back to her opened book, as though our conversation wasn’t that much of a big deal, “She came to this time plane for the sake of protecting the future she came from.” I have a feeling that she’s casually describing something that sounds very important.

“For Asahina Mikuru’s time plane, Suzumiya Haruhi is a variable. In order to stabilize the future, it is necessary to input the correct value. Asahina Mikuru’s mission is to adjust that variable to an acceptable value.”

Nagato quietly flipped the pages without making any sound. Her emotionless black eyes didn’t even blink once as she continued,

“Koizumi Itsuki and Asahina Mikuru have different approaches in their missions regarding Suzumiya Haruhi. They will never acknowledge each other’s interpretation, since each side’s theory would threaten the very meaning of the other’s existence.”

Wait… didn’t Koizumi say he only got his powers three years ago? Nagato quickly answered my question,

“No one can guarantee that Koizumi Itsuki is telling the truth.” The image of his handsome smiling face flashed by in my head, true enough, no one can guarantee that he’s trustworthy. It’s just that Koizumi was able to provide a decent explanation for all the things that I’ve encountered so far. Who could guarantee that it’s the right explanation? Even Asahina-san told me not to believe him, but Asahina-san was the same, who could guarantee that Asahina-san’s explanation is correct? I looked at Nagato and thought, maybe what Koizumi said wasn’t true, and maybe Asahina-san never realized that her opinion could be wrong, so perhaps only this calm alien wouldn’t lie.

“So what do you think? Which is the right explanation? You mentioned something about the possibility to self-evolve, what kind of outcome would that have?”

The bookworm wrapped all in black remained emotionless and said, “No matter how accurately I convey it, there is no way you can find solid proof for it.” “Why’s that?”

At this moment, I saw something I rarely ever see. I was stunned to see Nagato having a confused look as she said,

“Because no one can guarantee what I say is true.”

Nagato then placed down her book and left the club room, leaving this line, “At least for you.”

The chimes began to ring, signaling classes were to begin soon.

I don’t get it.

How could a normal person get it?

Whether it’s Koizumi or Nagato, they ought to explain things in a language that people can understand! I even suspect whether they had intentionally made it hard for me to understand. You two ought to take more time to organize your thoughts, or else no one is going to listen to what you say, as the words will simply go in one ear and out the other.

As I walked with my arms crossed, a bunch of people in stateless medieval costumes walked past me and turned into the corridor corner. If Nagato were to blend in with these people with her black cloak, no one would suspect a thing. Maybe some class has decided to begin filming their own science fiction movie, not wanting to let

Haruhi take all the glory. That wouldn't be too bad, at least they won't be as frustrated as I am and would happily make their movie, led by a director with more common sense and giving sensible commands.

I sighed deeply and headed for the Class 1-5 room.

Haruhi was the only one who thought the movie production was going according to plan, while the vertical lines just increase and darken on my face, as well as Koizumi's and Asahina-san's.

As filming progressed, many things happened along the way. For some time, the toy gun has been spraying water bullets instead of BB bullets; Asahina-san would tremble every time Haruhi brought a different colored contact lens (the gold ones could fire rifle bullets, while the green ones would emit micro-black holes), and she would end up getting bitten by Nagato; the cherry blossoms wilted the following day as soon as they had blossomed; and it seems the white pigeons in the shrine have now morphed into the supposedly extinct passenger pigeons (as Koizumi secretly told me); even the Earth's precession has shifted a bit (according to Nagato).

The normal world was slowly beginning to derail.

As I dragged my exhausted body home, the whiskered animal opened his mouth again, "So is it fine as long as I keep my mouth shut in front of that energetic girl?" The cat sat on my bed with the posture of the Sphinx.

"You sure are quite obedient," I gently grabbed on Shamisen's long tail, which eventually slid out of my fingers.

"Since that is what you wish, though even I feel that it wouldn't be a good thing to let that girl hear me speak." "Well, that's right according to Koizumi."

As this cat can talk, we needed to find a plausible reason to explain why it could talk. A simple solution is to create a world where no one would find it strange to see cats talking. But what sort of world would that be? And what kind of cats would there be?

Shamisen yawned endlessly and tidied his tail as he said, "There are many kinds of cats, aren't humans the same?" I'd sure like to know what you mean by "many kinds."

"What can you do even if you knew? I don't think you can ever replace cats, nor do I think you understand how cats think."

This is really frustrating, everything is.

As I was about to go take a bath, my sister came in saying I have a visitor.

I went downstairs wondering who it was. I never thought it would be Koizumi. I decided to go outside the house to talk to him under the night sky. I didn't want to invite him in, or I would end up having to hear him go on endlessly with his long speeches. Besides, I don't want to listen to him and Shamisen simultaneously lecturing me with abstract philosophies that are difficult to understand.

Just as I thought, Koizumi flooded me with his speeches, and in the end, he even said this, "For Suzumiya-san, the minor details and sub-plots aren't important. I actually find this interesting, and that was enough as well. The story lacked any resolution or tight plotting, or any clues to a sequel, since she has after all come up with a plot in a very short time. She did not even consider an ending, who knows, the movie might simply end without one." What's wrong with that? So you're saying if the movie ends in such an unresolved way, this reality would be permanently distorted and become the new reality? Haruhi must have an ending in mind, and it must be an ending that is in line with reality. This is a problem that we must consider, as Haruhi would never consider such stuff, and even if she does, it would only end in disaster. So it's still better for us to do the thinking. But why must we think of such stuff? Isn't there someone else that can carry this cursed burden for us? "If he even exists, then yes."

Koizumi shrugged his shoulders,

"I believe he would have appeared before us long ago if he existed. So we must find a solution as soon as possible, especially you. I look forward to seeing you work harder."

Work harder on what? Please be specific.

"Because once the fictional world becomes reality, our theories will be for naught. Maybe Asahina-san would be affected as well, because her faction seems to have their own set of theories. As for Nagato-san, I don't know much about her, but I guess observers usually accept whatever outcome they obtain. Her faction would calmly accept any outcome, even if the Earth were to disappear; as long as Suzumiya-san still exists, that would be enough for them."

The street lamps shined on Koizumi's expressionless face within the dark, "I can honestly tell you this, the 'Organization' and Asahina-san's faction aren't the only people whose philosophies revolve around Suzumiya-san. There are many more of them out there, so many that I'd want to tell you about the secret battles we have

fought behind the scenes, allies that have betrayed us, and all the conspiracy and deceit, as well as the destruction and killings that have been going on as we speak. Each faction has poured all their resources to battle each other in order to survive." Koizumi continued, carrying a worn-out, cynical smile, "Even I don't find our theory to be absolutely correct; but for the current situation, there would be no place for me if I didn't accept this theory for now. I was initially set up to be with one side, and I am not able to switch sides. It's just like how a white chess piece cannot become a pawn for the black side." Why can't you use Othello and shogi as examples? "All this probably has nothing to do with you. It's the same for Suzumiya-san, which is a good thing, especially for Suzumiya-san. I hope that she'll never learn about this. I don't want to leave a scar in her heart. By my standards, Suzumiya-san possesses traits that are likeable. Of course, you possess them as well." "Why are you telling me all this?" "Just slipped out of my mouth, there's no particular reason. Maybe I was joking, or maybe I was possessed by a strange thought, or maybe I'm just trying to win your sympathy. No matter, it's all unimportant." Indeed, it wasn't funny at all.

"I might as well tell you something else that's not really important. Have you ever thought why Asahina Mikuru… I'm sorry, why Asahina-san would hang out with us? True, Asahina-san has the looks of an adorable pretty girl, and I can understand how people can be moved to give her a helping hand. You probably sympathize with what she's doing, right?"

"And what's wrong with that?"

Protecting the weak from the strong is what every person should aspire to.

"Her mission is to get close to you, which is why Asahina-san has that appearance and personality, which happens to be your favorite type of girl – the weak and cute type. Since you are the only person who Suzumiya-san listens to, to a certain extent, it was imperative that she has your attention."

I fell as silent as a deep-sea fish, and recalled what Asahina-san told me half a year ago. Not the Asahina-san now, but the Asahina-san from a further future, the adult Asahina-san. Having called me out to meet her with a note, that Asahina-san told me, "Please don't get too close with me." Did she tell me that after considering her own position? Or is that really her genuine thought?

Seeing as I remained speechless, Koizumi continued in a deep voice that sounded as old as the Jomon-sugi, "If Asahina-san is merely playing the role of an innocent cute girl, but is in fact up to something else, what are you going to do? She probably thinks

it's easier to get your sympathy this way. The way she looked innocent and helpless when having to put up with Suzumiya-san's unreasonable demands, this was all part of her plan. She did all that so that she could catch your attention." I think this guy's totally nuts. Learning from Nagato, I replied without conveying any speck of emotion, "I'm sick and tired of hearing your stupid jokes."

Koizumi slowly smiled and stuck out his arms in an exaggerated manner, "Oh, I'm sorry. Looks like I still have a long way to go at making jokes. I made all that unreasonable stuff up just so I could fool you. Just trying to say something that would leave an impression in your mind. Have you actually taken it seriously? Well, you've actually given me some confidence in my acting. Now I can go into the play feeling relaxed." He laughed deafeningly and continued,

"Our class is going to hold a Shakespearean play, 'Hamlet' to be precise. I'll be playing Guildenstern." Never heard of him, I'm guessing it's just a supporting character anyway.

"He was supposed to be, but half-way through rehearsals we decided to use the Tom Stoppard version instead, so I have to appear in even more scenes now."

Well, keep up the good work. Though I had no idea there were other versions of Hamlet besides the Shakespearean version.

"Because of Suzumiya-san's movie and my class's play, my schedule is very tight right now, so I'm feeling the pressure already. If I look tired, that's probably the reason. I don't think I can take it any more if a Sealed Dimension decides to appear now. That's why I came to ask you for help. I have to ask you to think of a way to prevent Suzumiya-san's movie from becoming the source for further paranormal events."

You mean a reasonable ending? Didn't you say we could just declare it all to be a dream? "Just make Haruhi think that everything within her movie is just make believe… Right?" "She must clearly be aware of it as well. She's a clever girl, as she knows that a movie is fictional after all. I just feel it'll be best if things can go along that direction. I must let you understand that things can't continue like this, and this has to be settled before filming ends." *I'm counting on you.* Koizumi bowed to me, and then disappeared into the darkness. What the hell man? He came just so he could shove all the responsibility onto me? Since he's already so busy, I have to take care of the rest, is that what he's saying? If that's the case, he's found the wrong person. This isn't a card game, and I'm not shirking responsibility either. Suzumiya Haruhi isn't the fifty-third card. She's neither the King, nor the Ace, and she's not the Joker even.

“But…”

I mumbled to myself.

Looks like I can’t leave this like that anymore. Leaving Nagato aside, Asahina-san and Koizumi seem to be at their limits already. The world was probably the same as well… It’s just that I haven’t noticed.

“Damn it…”

This is so annoying! Damn! I’m feeling frustrated as well! I thought very hard, how could I cancel out Haruhi’s wild imagination? The movie world and our reality are two different objects, they don’t interfere with each other – what should I do to make her completely understand that? What can I do to make her once again accept what was once taken for granted? A dream…? What else besides that? There wasn’t much time until the school festival begins.

The next day, I made a suggestion to Haruhi. After debating for a while, she finally nodded and agreed to it.

“We’re done!”

Haruhi shouted loudly while slapping her loudspeaker,

“Nice job guys! All the filming is complete now! I’d like to thank everyone for their hard work, especially myself! Hmm, sometimes I really amaze myself, great job!”

Hearing her announcement, Asahina-san the waitress finally slumped on her knees, and felt like weeping tears of joy. In fact, she was indeed weeping, but Haruhi had interpreted it as Asahina-san being moved by her speech.

“Mikuru-chan, it’s still too early to cry now, save your tears until we receive the Palme d’Or or the Oscar for Best Picture! We’ll reap the success together then!”

There was only a day left till the school festival. We were gathered at the rooftop of the school complex, as the filming schedule was so tight that we had no time even to eat.

The final battle between Mikuru and Yuki was put to an end by Koizumi Itsuki, who, after suddenly becoming aware of his powers, used his incredible power to blast Yuki out to the other side of the universe.

“This is perfect! A superb movie! Just as I expected! We’ll attract lots of studios wanting to buy this movie if we take it to Hollywood! But first we’ll need to sign a contract with a smart agent!”

Haruhi’s embrace of globalization was breathtaking. I don’t know who would watch this movie, the only selling point would be its female protagonist, the other cast and crew weren’t even worth mentioning. If possible, I’d like to go as Asahina-san’s agent. I’m sure I could make a little bit of commission from this. I might as well try and groom Haruhi as the next idol. Maybe I should start by sending their photos and resumes.

“Is it finally over?”

Koizumi smiled cheerfully at me and said.

Now that pissed me off, though that free of charge smile of his suited him just well. I prefer him this way instead of him looking melancholic, and that makes me really uncomfortable.

“When you look back, now that filming is over, it feels as though it had all happened in an instant. Some people say time passes by quickly when one is happy, I wonder who the happy one is?”

Who knows?

“Can I count on you to take care of the rest? Right now all I’m thinking of is the play rehearsals for my class. Unlike a movie, you can’t do retakes in a play.”

Koizumi carried his usual smile, and patted me on the back of my shoulder as he whispered, “There’s one more thing I need to thank you for, on behalf of the group, as well as myself.” He then left the rooftop. Following Koizumi, Nagato quietly left as well without carrying any emotions.

Asahina-san had her shoulders wrapped by Haruhi’s arm as they looked out towards the sea in the distance.

“Our target is Hollywood and Broadway!” she was forced to shout out loudly. It’s a good thing to have a great ambition, but if you go along the direction you’re currently facing, you’ll end up in Australia instead.

“Sigh.”

I sighed and sat down, putting the camera by my side. For Koizumi, Nagato and Asahina-san, things may well be over; but for me, the problems have merely begun. There were still things to do.

Someone needs to find a way to convert this massive footage, which is basically a pile of worthless junk data, into a “movie.” And who’s in charge of that? I didn’t even have to guess.

On Friday evening, only Haruhi and I remained in the clubroom, while the other three went to work on their respective classes’ activities.

While it was good that filming was complete, it had dragged on for too long, and there was little time left to deal with other matters. After uploading the footage onto the computer and repeatedly viewing it, I came to a conclusion – this was basically a cheap promo-video for Asahina Mikuru.

To be frank, until the very end I still had no idea what sort of movie Haruhi had made. The waitress, the girl of death, and the young man grinning like an idiot all the time, just what was wrong with their heads? And there simply wasn’t enough time to work on the post-production, like visual effects, not to mention we don’t have the skills to do it. Looks like we’ll just have to release this raw footage without going through any editing.

Haruhi began to pout,

“How could you show something that isn’t even complete? Don’t you have a solution?” Are you talking to me?

“Rushing me won’t help, the school festival’s tomorrow, and I’m already trying my best. It’s already a headache for me to splice together all the scenes that you thought up in an instant. I don’t feel like watching any movies right now.”

But Haruhi was good at quashing other people’s opinions instantaneously, “Wouldn’t you be able to make it if you stayed up all night?” *Who’s going to stay up?* I didn’t ask that, because right now there was only me, and Haruhi looking straight at me with her black sandalwood-like eyes.

“We could just stay here tonight,”

Haruhi then said something that made me very surprised, “I’ll help you.”

Judging from the result, Haruhi never helped much. For a while she stood mumbling behind me, but within an hour, she was already lying asleep on the table. Really, I felt like filming her in her sleep. I could place the image of her sleeping in the movie’s ending.

I might as well tell you, it seems I too have fallen asleep after a while. Because by the time I opened my eyes, the sun had already risen, and the keyboard was imprinted onto half of my face.

So, staying up last night had no meaning whatsoever, the movie was still incomplete. I tried all ways to edit here and there, trying to make out a thirty minute movie, but it still looked like a piece of pathetic trash. I guess this is what a movie would look like when made by an impulsive amateur. It could have been fine if it only showed Asahina-san doing the shopping street commercials in her bunny-girl costume, but as the whole thing was cut and pasted together sloppily, pulling together a story that was pretty much non-existent, the movie was just unbearable. In the end, the movie wasn’t edited, and visual effects weren’t even added, it was just a hilariously rubbish movie. I don’t think even Taniguchi would want to watch that.

I wanted to throw the computer out of the window, but the sunlight shining in caused me to squint my eyes. As I spent the whole night sleeping in an unnatural pose, I now felt aches all over my body.

It was six-thirty when I was awakened by Haruhi, who had gotten up before me. Now that I think about it, this was the first time I spent the night at school.

“Hey, so how’d it go?”

Haruhi looked at the screen over my shoulder, so I moved the mouse and clicked on the screen.

“…Wow!”

Haruhi exclaimed delightedly, while I widened my jaw in shock. Our movie title was revealed in an impressive CG background. “The Adventure of Asahina Mikuru-chan Episode 00” then began. Though the story was very inconsistent, the lines could

barely be heard, the camera could be seen shaking, even the director yelling was shown in the footage, but it seems to have reached a certain level for a movie made by high school students. Not only were there lasers shooting from Asahina-san's eyes, even Nagato's wands emitted beams with strange colors.

"Heh heh."

Even Haruhi was impressed,

"Not bad at all! It's not perfect, but it shows you can still come up with something as long as you put your heart into it."

It wasn't me. It was probably someone else who did this while I was sleeping, there was no way I could do this. The most likely suspect was Nagato, followed by Koizumi. Asahina-san was out of the question. Or it could be a mysterious person who has yet to appear? That has to be it.

For some time, we quietly watched the movie that somehow managed to edit itself. If it weren't for this small screen… I'm sure our impression would be even greater if we saw it on a larger screen.

The movie on the screen now showed its final scene, Koizumi and Asahina-san walked hand-in-hand under the path with cherry blossom petals fluttering about. The camera then panned up and faced the clear blue sky, whereupon the ending theme then began to play as the credits started rolling out.

Finally, there was Haruhi's disclaimer.

It was a disclaimer that I convinced Haruhi to do at all costs. I told her that she must include this crucial element at the end of the movie, and it had to be done by the director herself.

It was a magical disclaimer that would eliminate all of the problems created: "The events depicted in this movie are fictitious. It has nothing to do with any person, organization, and any other known terms and phenomena. It's all made up nonsense. Any resemblance to the above is purely coincidental. Oh, the commercials are different. Please give your support to Oomori Electronics and the Yamatsuchi Model Store! Huh? You want me to repeat it? The events depicted in this movie are fictitious. It has nothing to do with any person, organiza—Kyon, why do I have to say this? Isn't it obvious?"

Epilogue

By the time the school's festival started, we weren't that busy any more.

Actually I think the most fun of any event occurs during the preparation stage. Once an event starts, everyone is so busy that no one notices time passing by. Very soon it's time to conclude and clean up. So before that happens, let's enjoy this free time! At the very least, I'm free today and tomorrow; I hope no one will yell in my ears during my relaxation period.

As for Haruhi, the only person who just might complain about this peaceful time, she's in her bunny suit again, passing out flyers at the front gate. I kinda want to know how many she'll manage to pass out before teachers and administrators step in again.

I walked out of the club room, striding towards the lively campus.

My heart, filled with unrest just a while ago, finally seemed to have settled down. Koizumi believed that, and Nagato also promised, so there shouldn't be any problems right now. Because Shamisen can't talk anymore, this is what I needed to confirm that everything is back to normal. The current Shamisen is as silent as Nagato; I felt that it would be inhumane to chase him out, so I thought I would keep him as a pet. Also, my sister is very excited about having a stuffed toy that can move about on its own, so I told my family that "the previous owner decided to move."

This male cat would sometimes make meowing noises, but that was what it sounded like to my ears, maybe it really did talk… Eh, nevermind.

In terms of disappearances, those who were wearing weird costumes from several days before did not actually participate in the festival.

I've seen the pamphlet passed out by the executive committee, and they weren't on there. I've also spied on possible club rooms (such as the Theater Society), and failed to find anything. Who were those people?

"Hmm."

I unconsciously murmured to myself, while walking leisurely in the school's building.

What if there were supernatural people walking around the school? What if they were also wearing futuristic clothing? Right, just like Nagato.

Had it been really like that, then Nagato-san might've dressed like that to conceal her true identity from Haruhi, if only to give her the impression that clothing like those only appear during festivals.

Nagato has always been the silent type, so I have no idea if any of this is true. But it's very likely that another sort of conflict is happening outside of my knowledge, perhaps happening in a very relaxed manner. Even if we're on the verge of Earth's destruction, I believe she'll still remain silent. If I ask her directly, she might tell me. But, I think she would just say something that is incomprehensible using the language available to humans, and I don't think I have the intellect to try to comprehend what she might say.

Hence, I chose to be silent myself. Especially to Haruhi, I believe I should keep my silence.

Change of topic. Our movie is currently playing in the viewing room. I believe only ours and the Movie Research Society's film are being played. This is after Haruhi made a huge protest to that club, and they finally gave in and agreed to show our movie along with their production. Hey, it couldn't be helped, only that room has a projector. I have to admit they were looking very troubled until the very end, but still, they, as well as anyone else in this world, don't seem to have the ability to reject any decision from Haruhi. So in the end, they were practically forced to show our low quality movie that has commercials in the middle.

Since we're at this topic, I should also let you know that according to the student executive committee, the SOS Brigade still isn't an official club. So "The Adventure of Asahina Mikuru" isn't on the official list of events. Looks like we won't be able to win the first prize after all. I think all those votes intended for us will probably go to the Movie Research Society instead.

Oh yeah, remember that midnight movie that supposedly gave Haruhi the idea of making our own film? After some research, I discovered that it didn't win the Golden Globe Award. It was a black and white promotional movie which was shown in the Cannes Film Festival called "Only." She must've been crazy to think this film would win any award. To confirm this, I even rented the film. It turned out that I fell asleep within the first half hour. So I have no idea whether the content is fun or boring. I think I'll attempt it again before I return it.

Since it was a rare opportunity, I also watched the play from class 1-9.

Koizumi was smiling the whole time during the play. His character was someone who died very stupidly at the end; the stupidity level rivaled that of Haruhi's movie. But somehow it seemed to be quite popular. Maybe I was unconsciously putting it down because the actor was Koizumi. His acting wasn't really acting, it seemed more like him just representing himself normally. That was probably another reason why I didn't think it was so good.

After bowing to the clapping audience, Koizumi winked at me as a reply. Of course I ran away from his wink as it reached me. As for Nagato's class, I was going to make fun of them too. However, I didn't expect that there was already a long line to the fortune telling room. I took a small peek inside. Under the black drapes, in the middle of several girls dressed in black, I saw Nagato's white and expressionless face. She put her hands on the crystal ball, talking to the customers in a tone without much emotion. Nagato, please, just help them search for lost items and don't do anything else.

About all those abnormalities caused by the movie, they all seemed to be fixed by adding "This story is a work of fiction" at the end. But this world can't just be fixed by a simple saying like that, can it? Haruhi, Asahina-san, Nagato, Koizumi, and I are all still here, aren't we? How is "There is no relation to any real people" even true? Maybe someday, all of us would live out our own lives, but at least the SOS Brigade still exists right now, both its chief and its members.

Ahh… How should I put it? Sometimes I would think, maybe all of this is a giant lie, and Haruhi really doesn't have any powers, it's just a joke made up by Asahina, Nagato, and Koizumi. Those doves were merely painted; Shamisen talking was just ventriloquism or a hidden microphone; and cherry petals in Fall, plus the Mikuru Beam were just special effects.

Even if it's really like this, I still can't say much to this.

"So there's no way that it's possible."

No matter what now, that kind of situation isn't exactly happy. I think everyone being stranded together is much more relaxing than being stranded alone with Haruhi. I'm glad I'm not the only SOS Brigade member.

Even if I'm the only normal one.

The classroom clock entered my line of sight, and this place has already become a place to relax, just like the 1-5 classroom.

Ah yes, now is not the time to space out, it's almost time. How can I waste this precious discount coupon? Not to mention I'm also interested in what she's wearing.

I quickly ran towards the meeting place decided with Taniguchi and Kunikida. The plan was to visit the udon place waited upon by Asahina-san.

Author's notes

As the convenience stores nearby keep going out of business one by one, I now have to spend fifteen minutes just to walk to the nearest one. Along the way, there lies a large pond which would be gathered with migratory birds during winter.

It's already summer, but for some reason, there was one male wild duck swimming idly on the surface of the pond.

I thought to myself, why would this wild duck shun his mates and choose to be alone? I imagined him waking up one spring morning looking stunned to find that he's all alone, being left behind just like that. I felt a sense of pity for him. But a few days ago when I went out to buy some stuff, I found this wild duck walking relaxingly near the center of the pond quacking away. I breathed a sigh of relief for no reason. Turns out this duck was just an eccentric duck!

Just like there are eccentric humans who would shun society for no reason, this duck was the same among his kind. Perhaps he had turned down his mates' offer to fly north with them, insisting, "No thanks, I want to stay here. No particular reason, really." And chose to stray away from his niche. As he was a strange duck that liked to loiter around at night, I instinctively concluded that this was a duck that doesn't mind living alone in a wide pond, a duck that loved solitude.

I thought and agreed with my own deduction, but later some research have discovered that recently there were more and more migratory birds that remained here instead of flying north once spring has arrived. In other words, as there are often people feeding them by the pond, they didn't have to worry about starving, and would start to feel comfortable staying here. This means this isn't some eccentric duck, but a simple-minded duck that doesn't like to go through so much trouble. I felt dejected by this fact, it's as though my dreams have been shattered, and so I have written this, but I guess that duck wouldn't give a damn about it.

Let's get to the main subject, the next volume would be a compilation of short stories published in the Sneaker magazine (currently it is the summer of 2003). The title would be "The Boredom of Suzumiya Haruhi," I guess? But it could be subject to change. Since I only spent less than three seconds to come up with the title of "The Melancholy of Suzumiya Haruhi," so I had no idea how to name the rest of the series. In fact, I never thought it would become a series of novels, sorry about that.

Changing the subject again, a big thanks to those that stayed on to play a long game of mahjong with me. I'm grateful for your mercy…… Nope, nothing.

Finally, I'd like to thank Mr. S for editing this book and Ito Noiji-sensei for her illustrations. As well as everyone involved in the publication of this book, and to the readers reading this book, you have my deep gratitude. I look forward to seeing you again.

—Tanigawa Nagaru

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